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1 Corinthians

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INTRODUCTION

Reading 1 Corinthians

It has been well said that reading 1 Corinthians is like reading someone else's mail. Here we have a letter from the earliest days of the Christian movement written, not for a modern readership, but for a fledgling group of "house churches" in the ancient Mediterranean city of Corinth. As we read it, we are given access to one side of a correspondence between Paul, the apostle and church founder, and members of the Corinthian church. Part of its fascination is that, as we read between the lines, the letter allows us to "lift the lid" on the life, loves, and hates of a particular church at the inception of Christianity. It also allows us to see firsthand how the great apostle exercised authority by giving guidance and responding to problems.

But the letter's fascination goes further than that. For, to a greater or lesser extent, we who read 1 Corinthians are liable to find that the life, loves, and hates to which the text bears witness are *ours as well* (Ford 1989; Craddock 1990). This is partly what we mean when we say that the biblical text is "inspired." But it is also related to the fact that 1 Corinthians has had a very significant "afterlife." By its incorporation into the canon of Christian Scripture as a work of apostolic authority, 1 Corinthians has shaped who we are as readers. Seen in this light, the text can be understood as addressed not just to the house churches of first-century Corinth but to all who share their inheritance. This embraces all members of the Christian church down the ages and all who stand in those historical traditions and cultures which have been shaped by the canon of Christian Scripture. Indeed, according to Christian belief in the inspiration of Scripture, the truth to which 1 Corinthians testifies touches all humankind. What Paul says about "Christ crucified" in ch. 1, or about the true nature of love in ch. 13, or about the resurrection of the dead in ch. 15 is testimony of universal and eternal significance. That is why it is important that our engagement with the text be a dialectical one: that we engage in a two-way process whereby it is both we who read the text and the text which "reads" us.

The implications of this for our interpretation are wide-ranging. First, we have to take with full seriousness the historical contingency of the text. We can understand Paul's letter only if we enter, imaginatively and with the aid of historical criticism in its various modes, into the world of the text itself. This involves finding out as much as possible about the values and structures of first-century city life, the thought world and common

practices (Jewish, Greco-Roman and Christian) of Paul and his contemporaries, the practice of rhetoric and letter writing in the first century, the geography and archeology of Corinth, and so on. Such historical information allows us to understand the setting and content of 1 Corinthians more clearly. It also serves as a check on interpretation, on the dual assumption that the number of possible meanings is not indeterminate and that weight has to be given to what the text meant in its original context as far as that can be determined.

Second, we have to take with equal seriousness the text's continuing significance in the life of the church. The significance of 1 Corinthians cannot be restricted to what it originally meant, for that is itself a matter of ongoing interpretation. Its significance is also ongoing, as people both within and outside the church read their stories in the light of the truth of God to which 1 Corinthians bears witness (cf. Webster 1998). Our task is not just an "archeological" one, therefore. To do justice to the ecclesiological aspect of the text, in its content, its place in the canon, and its contribution to Christian worship, we have to read it as the "word of God" for the church in its mission to the world. But to do justice to its spatial and temporal horizons, we also have to read it eschatologically, as the "word of God" for the present with a view to the future consummation of all things. Reading 1 Corinthians asks of us no less than that. It is a task which invites repeated return to the text in every generation.

Author and Date

There can be no doubt that 1 Corinthians was written by the apostle Paul. What the text itself makes explicit at its beginning and end (1:1; 16:21) and what is explicit also in 2 Corinthians (1:1) is confirmed by the testimony of 1 Clement: "Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the apostle. . . . With true inspiration he charged you concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos, because even then you had made yourself partisans" (1 Clem. 47:1-3). Additional corroboration is provided by the evidence of the Acts of the Apostles, which correlates well with 1 Corinthians. For example, Acts confirms that Paul was the founder of the church at Corinth (Acts 18:1-11), that Apollos made a significant contribution to the life of the church there after Paul had moved on (Acts 18:27-19:1), and that Paul numbered people like Timothy (Acts 18:5) and Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2, 18) among his fellow workers there. So we can be very confident that 1 Corinthians comes from Paul. This is important not just for

reasons of historical authenticity but also for how we receive the text and respond to it in the life of the Christian church, what authority we give it. As a letter from one "called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (1 Cor 1:1), it has special, canonical status, for it bears decisive witness to Christ and the truth of the gospel.

The likely date of the letter can also be established with confidence as sometime in the years AD 54-55. From Acts 18:2 we learn of Paul's partnership at Corinth in the tentmaking trade with Aquila and Priscilla, the latter having come from Italy as a result of Claudius's decree ordering the expulsion of Jews from Rome. Since the decree can be dated to 49, it is likely that Paul arrived in Corinth in about AD 50. Acts also refers to the fact that Gallio was proconsul in Achaia and had oversight of judicial proceedings which involved Paul (and Sosthenes) and which led to his departure (Acts 18:12-17). Gallio's proconsulship has been confirmed by epigraphic evidence which allows a dating of his term of office to 51-52. According to Acts 18:11, Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months, so we can be reasonably certain that the years of his stay were AD 50-52 (on the evidence relating to Claudius and Gallio, see Murphy-O'Connor 1983: 129-52).

After his departure, there was a substantial lapse of time during which Paul visited Jerusalem and Antioch, traveled through Galatia, and made his base for two years in Ephesus (Acts 18:22-23; 19:1-20). This was also the time when Apollos ministered in Corinth (Acts 18:27-19:1; cf. 1 Cor 16:12). Given this time lapse, it is reasonable to conclude that the letter we know as 1 Corinthians was written in Ephesus in the period AD 54-55 (see, in general, Jewett 1979).

The Occasion of the Letter

Precisely what triggered the writing of the letter is hard to determine. It is clear, nevertheless, that the letter is part of an ongoing interaction between Paul and the Corinthians, something unsurprising given the relatively close proximity of Ephesus and Corinth. We know, for example, that Paul received oral reports from visitors making him aware of scandal and division within the church (1 Cor. 4:17; 5:1; 11:18). One such report is attributed to "Chloe's people" at the letter's opening (1:11) to the effect that factions were developing between groups claiming different spiritual leaders as their respective patrons and benefactors (1:12). At the letter's close, there is also mention of a delegation made up of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17), and it is reasonable to assume that Paul learned much about the situation at Corinth from them also.

In addition to oral reports, there is reference in 7:1 to a letter from the church itself (perhaps brought by Stephanas), asking for Paul's advice. We do not know precisely what matters were raised in the Corinthians' letter to Paul, nor in what order. However, the formula *peri de* ("Now concerning . . ."), which occurs at 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12, is a significant verbal indicator of the subjects about which Paul, at least, wanted to give instruction. These include: rules for the married (7:1-24) and for the

unmarried (7:25-40), whether or not to eat food offered to idols (8:1-11:1), the proper exercise of "spiritual gifts" (12:1-14:40), the collection for Jerusalem (16:1-4), and the situation regarding Apollos (16:12). Included in this sequence is instruction on two other significant matters: abuses at the Lord's Supper (11:17-34) and disagreements over the resurrection of the dead (15:1-58).

We can only speculate why the Corinthian church fell victim to factionalism and why it needed instruction on such a range of fundamental issues. Some possible reasons will be explored in the commentary. Most likely, they had to do with factors both external and internal: influences upon the church from the outside world and dynamics within the church especially in the period after Paul moved on (cf. Hurd 1965). By extrapolating from Paul's response in 1 Corinthians, some have tried to reconstruct in a fairly thoroughgoing way a "Corinthian theology" manifesting itself in various ways in the church's common life. For example, some see the problem as gnosticism manifesting itself in an "overrealized" eschatology (Schmithals 1971), others detect the influence of Hellenistic-Jewish "wisdom" speculation (Pearson 1973), others identify the interests and activity of "spiritual enthusiasts" (Fee 1987), while yet others locate the problem in the beliefs and practices of a group of female prophets (Wire 1990).

Each of these suggestions may have something to commend it. But the hypothetical nature of such proposals has to be recognized given the absence of independent testimony and the difficulty of correlating a theological or religious viewpoint with any of the groups alluded to in 1:10-12. Furthermore, as Gerd Theissen (1982) has helped us to see, it may be that the causes of the various problems are as much social and cultural as "theological," and that it is Paul (rather more than his "opponents") who responds theologically and ecclesiologically. As Hays (1997: 8) puts it: "The brilliance of Paul's letter lies in his ability to diagnose the situation in theological terms and to raise the inchoate theological issues into the light of conscious reflection in light of the gospel." It is certainly providential for us that this wide range of problems did arise and that Paul gave such a comprehensive theological and ecclesiological response in his letter. It is the profundity of Paul's letter which has made it so significant in Christian moral and theological reflection down the ages.

The Unity and Structure of the Letter

There have been various scholarly arguments to the effect that apparent dislocations in the flow of the letter require us to posit a kind of partition theory according to which either the letter is a composite of several separate fragments or the letter was written in stages (cf. Hurd 1965: 43-58; de Boer 1994). The possibility that later, post-Pauline material has been interpolated into the text is also a matter of vigorous debate. The material on the place of women in the church (11:2-16; 14:33b-36) is a case in point and has obvious significance for debates in modern times about the role of women (cf. Fee 1987: 699-708).

The status of each text needs to be examined on its merits. What needs to be said here is that, whether or not such "problem texts" are deemed part of Paul's original letter and therefore part of Paul's teaching to the Corinthians, their appropriation as the "word of God for today" requires *Christian theological interpretation* within the ongoing life of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (cf. Barton 1997b: 98-115).

In spite of arguments to the contrary, however, a good case can be made that 1 Corinthians is a literary unity. Study of the form and style of ancient letters has shown that the way Paul begins and ends his letter is a Christian improvisation upon a recognizable epistolary genre. Furthermore, awareness of analogies in ancient letter writing makes it possible to identify 1 Corinthians as a real and coherent letter (cf. Stowers 1986). It begins with the conventional address, greeting, and thanksgiving (1:1-9) and ends with the conventional travel plans, greetings, autograph, and benediction (16:5-23).

Perhaps even more important has been recent study of ancient rhetorical practice. The work of Margaret Mitchell (1992) in particular has shown that, from a rhetorical point of view, Paul's letter is a unity. Its content and structure conform to that form of persuasion known as "deliberative rhetoric" in which an appeal is made — based upon arguments about what is "advantageous" (*to sympheron*) and backed up by supporting examples (*paradeigmata*) — with a view to action toward a future goal, a goal which often has to do with achieving "concord" (*homonoia*). Instead of breaking the text up into (hypothetical) fragments of previous letters or trying to achieve the impossible task of correlating the conflicting "religious" parties in Corinth with the various pastoral and theological issues Paul tackles, Mitchell argues that the common denominator which ties all the issues together is that they all contribute to factionalism, and that it is *factionalism itself* (rather than particular factions) which Paul is attempting to combat from the beginning of 1 Corinthians to its end. In this connection, Mitchell shows that many of the commonplaces found in ancient deliberative rhetoric concerned with concord are scattered throughout 1 Corinthians and bind it together (cf. the summary in 1992: 180-81). Her analysis produces the following outline of the letter's structure (1992: x-xi):

- I. 1:1-3 Epistolary Prescript
- II. 1:4-9 Epistolary Thanksgiving
- III. 1:10-15:58 Epistolary Body
 - A. 1:10 the main thesis statement (*prothesis*) of the entire letter
 - B. 1:11-17 a statement of the facts (*narratio*) underlying the argument in the body of the letter
 - C. 1:18-15:57 the principal argument or "proof" (*probatio*) in four sections
 1. 1:18-4:21 first section of proof: censure of Corinthian factionalism
 2. 5:1-11:1 second section of proof: the integrity of the Corinthian community against outside defilement from sexual immorality (5:1-7:40) and idol meats (8:1-11:1), with a pertinent digression or *egressio* in ch. 9

3. 11:2-14:40 third section of proof: manifestations of Corinthian factionalism when "coming together" (divisive customs in worship, 11:2-16; divisions at the Lord's Supper, 11:17-34; spiritual gifts and unity, 12:1-14:40, with another digression or *egressio* in ch. 13)
4. 15:1-57 fourth section of proof: the resurrection as the final goal and the need for unity in the tradition

D. 15:58 conclusion (*peroratio*) summarizing the argument of the body of the letter

IV. 16:1-24 Epistolary Closing, including instructions on the collection (vv. 1-4), travel plans (vv. 5-12), recapitulation of the argument (vv. 13-18), greetings (vv. 19-21), and final curse and prayer for unity in love (vv. 22-24).

Mitchell's case for the unity of 1 Corinthians is impressive and has met with general approval (e.g., Witherington 1995: 73-77). Broadly speaking, it is the position taken in this commentary also. Awareness of the overall structure and unity of the letter is important primarily insofar as it contributes to our ability to read it with greater sensitivity, to identify the "real issues" it raises, and to understand the "theo-logic" of Paul's argument as a whole.

COMMENTARY

Greeting (1:1-3)

Paul begins by identifying himself, along with his brother-in-Christ Sosthenes (cf. Acts 18:17), as senders of the letter. The language Paul uses to identify and situate both himself and his addressees is significant. The focus is on what they have in common: God, Christ, and the call of God to be members of a new covenant people under the authority of Christ. This is the theological and ecclesial foundation upon which Paul wants to construct his whole argument.

Thus, in 1:1, Paul presents himself as "called" according to the will of God to be an "apostle" (or envoy) of Christ (cf. Gal 1:15-16). Therein lies his particular authority and role. He is not acting out of self-interest but in obedience to God's will and Christ's call. The Corinthians are also "called" (1:2). As in the case of Paul, their new life is grounded in grace, not in any achievement of their own. However, their call is not to apostleship but to be "saints" (*hagioi*), individuals set apart by union with Christ — "sanctified (*hēgiasmenoi*) in Christ Jesus" — who together make up a single body in one place, "the church of God that is in Corinth," and who belong at the same time to a society which is translocal, made up of "all those in every place" who acknowledge the lordship of Christ.

The call by God to be "saints" is biblical language for the election of Israel to be God's chosen people (cf. Lev 19:1-2); but here, in a way which must have been shocking to Jewish sensibilities (cf. Acts 10), it is applied to a mixed, predominantly Gentile, solidarity. This transformation of language represents a transformation of real-

ity, the coming into being of a new covenant community. The "church of God" is a society which transcends old boundaries and brings God's grace to people previously ignorant of it. The blessing with which Paul's greeting ends (1:3) sums up this new order of things. It is an order of "grace and peace" which has been bestowed upon the Corinthians as a gift from God. But with the gift comes an implied obligation. Indebtedness to God and Christ as their heavenly benefactors places the Corinthians under obligation to practice grace and peace in their relations with one another, something which, as the letter goes on to reveal, runs against the grain.

Thanksgiving (1:4-9)

As literary and rhetorical convention dictate, Paul now proceeds, as in his other letters, from greeting to thanksgiving (cf. Rom 1:8-17; Phil 1:3-11; 1 Thess 1:2-10; 2 Thess 1:3-12; and Doty 1973: 27-47). This section — known in rhetorical terms as the *proem* — serves a twofold purpose. By praising his addressees together (but indirectly, in the form of a prayer of thanksgiving to God), he unifies them and gets them "on side" in a manner which paves the way for their more ready reception of the stern advice and correction to follow (in 1:10ff.). At the same time, as with the greeting, the thanksgiving allows him to introduce ideas which become central to his argument later on — "grace," "riches," "speech," "knowledge," "spiritual gift," "establish," "call," and "fellowship." In other words, Paul's thanksgiving is genuine, but it is also weighted toward a particular rhetorical and pedagogical goal (cf. Mitchell 1992: 194-97).

The thanksgiving begins (1:4) by picking up on the theme of the grace of God introduced already in the words of the blessing in v. 3. Although it becomes clear subsequently that Paul is concerned with the ways in which the many manifestations of God's grace among the Corinthians have been abused (e.g., 4:6-21), it is nevertheless the case that Paul's starting point is celebration: God is to be thanked "continually" for his overwhelming grace manifesting itself "in every way" in particular "graces." That God's grace can be abused is not allowed to diminish the goodness either of God or of God's gifts, even if the awareness of human fallibility in receiving and exercising those gifts opens a space for irony. As Fee (1987: 36) puts it: "The verb 'I thank' controls the whole."

The particular graces Paul mentions in the thanksgiving are two: "all speech" and "all knowledge" (1:5). From 1 Corinthians 12-14, we can identify "speech" as referring to inspired utterance such as prophecy and speaking in tongues, and "knowledge" as the understanding of heavenly mysteries and prophetic revelation. Doubtless Paul mentions these two in particular because they are the ones so highly prized by the Corinthians (as perhaps also by Paul himself). But what is noteworthy is how Paul anticipates and refuses to collude with the tendency for manifestations of grace in the church to become a ground for boasting, rivalry, and faction. He does this in four ways, each of which in its own way draws attention away from human to divine ways of seeing.

First, he stresses that the graces are given by God and are available only by being "in Christ Jesus" (1:4). Second, they are a temporary expedient to help sustain believers while they "wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ," an experience of grace far more powerful than anything they may experience in the present (v. 7). Third, the fact that the coming of the Lord is a day of judgment (v. 8) is an implicit warning against behavior which is self-centered or arises from party spirit. Fourth, and reminiscent of the words of greeting (vv. 1-3), more important than the gifts (which may divide) is the "call" from God into a new eschatological solidarity, the "fellowship" (*koinōnia*) of those who belong to Christ (v. 9). It is this larger theological and eschatological horizon — climaxing in the affirmation "God is faithful" (v. 9) — which Paul deliberately introduces and which provides the grounds for sincere thanksgiving, even in the midst of human folly.

Paul's Appeal for Unity (1:10-17)

Following the greeting and the thanksgiving comes Paul's heartfelt call for unity within the fellowship (1:10). Here we have the main theme of the entire letter addressed to a church whose unity is threatened by factionalism (1:18-4:21), disputes about social morality (5:1-11:1), divisions over worship (11:2-14:40), and disagreement about the fate of the dead (15:1-57). Responding to insider reports of "divisions" from members of Chloe's household, Paul appeals for unity in the strongest possible terms: "I appeal (*parakalō*) to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement [lit. "speak the same"] and that there be no divisions (*schismata*) among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose" (1:10).

Important to note in passing is the fact that — given the prominence of concerns for the unity of the city-state in ancient political rhetoric and practice — Paul's letter has a goal which his addressees would recognize as practical and "political" (cf. Mitchell 1992: 81-111; Welborn 1997). What he writes is not "ivory tower theology," and his concerns as an apostle are not limited to "spiritual" matters. On the contrary, Paul is responding like the father (cf. 4:14-15) of a fragmented household or the leader of a divided people. His letter is "practical theology" in the fullest sense, aimed at promoting peace (*eirēnē*) among the new covenant people of God.

But equally important is the other side of the coin: that implicit in Paul's response to the Corinthians is the assumption that they themselves constitute a new society with its own distinctive polity, practices, and ethos. Part of the problem Paul seems to be dealing with is the narrowness and selectiveness of the Corinthians' self-understanding as believers, their failure to see that their new identity "in Christ" is a matter not just of the "spiritual things" (*ta pneumatika*) they prize so highly (cf. 1 Corinthians 12-14) but also (and even more) of their whole lives individual and corporate, spiritual and material (cf. Barclay 1992: 61-72). What Paul wants them to see is that, if they truly belong to the household of God (rather than individual

households) and if they are united now under a single, new name, "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:10), they belong to a new order of things, and this requires giving up old ways in favor of new, old "politics" in favor of new.

What appears to have happened, however, is that the Corinthians have brought the political practices of the wider society into the church instead of allowing the church to be the place and time where a new kind of "politics" could develop. They have divided along primarily household lines into factions, each faction uniting under a slogan ("I belong to Paul," "I belong to Apollos," etc.) which identifies them by their allegiance to one of the "leading men" in the church's short history. Apparently, this allegiance arises both out of the high value they place on association with itinerant, sophist-type figures skilled in rhetorical display (cf. Acts 18:24-28 on Apollos; and the analysis of Winter 1997b), and out of their sense of indebtedness to the one by whom they have been baptized (cf. 1:13b-16). Somehow, the apostles' preaching and ritual practice have been subverted by the Corinthians' love of appearances and display, verbal or ritual, along with associated opportunities for rivalry and "boasting" (cf. 1:29; 3:21; 4:7). Old habits, including old social and "political" habits, die hard. Whereas Paul sees the Christian *koinōnia* (association) as a new, eschatological society oriented toward what makes for "peace" (cf. 7:15b), for some (at least) of the Corinthians it is a legitimate sphere for the extension of personal power and influence.

So Paul takes them back behind what divides them to the fundamental *reordering* of status and power which his apostolic calling and preaching represent: "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent words of wisdom [lit. "not in wisdom of word"], so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power" (1:17). Here, for the first time, a fundamental contrast is drawn between two "words" (*logoi*) or "messages," two competing ways of seeing the world. On the one hand, there is Paul's gospel preaching (*euangelizesthai*), the content of which has to do with the death of the Messiah and is summed up in the phrase "the cross of Christ"; on the other is what delights the Corinthians — worldly "wisdom" (*sophia*) rhetorically displayed. This contrast underlies what Paul goes on to say in 1:18-2:5.

The point, in passing, about baptism is not that Paul is being "anti-sacramental," or exalting (what we might call) the Ministry of the Word over the Ministry of the Sacrament. Rather, in a context where both word and sacrament are being subverted by the Corinthians as occasions for human display, Paul points to the most powerful and subversive "display" of all: the cross of Christ. As previously, Paul's horizon is wholeheartedly God- and Christ-centered, and it is that horizon which he wants to persuade the Corinthians to share.

Paul's Censure of Corinthian Factionalism (1:18-4:21)

Paul now proceeds to develop this basic contrast between "the message of the cross" (1:18) and human wisdom. He

does so in three steps, each of which is designed to persuade the Corinthians that the Christian gospel and Christian existence *cannot merely be added on* to the wisdom they so highly prize, as if they are just more of the same. On the contrary, they require a radical reinterpretation of wisdom as understood in Corinth.

But to understand Paul's deep ambivalence about "wisdom" we need to clarify something of its range of meanings. This has been a matter of considerable debate (cf. Dunn 1995: 34-45; also Witherington 1994: 295-319). In brief, it is a matter both of content and practice. In terms of content, *sophia* refers to ideas and values deeply rooted in the Greek tradition and highly influential in Hellenistic Judaism. Its source is twofold: it is found either in the practiced scrutiny of nature and the affairs of humankind, or it comes direct from heaven by revelation through intermediaries, especially the Spirit. Its goal is individual and corporate salvation through the acquisition of true knowledge (*gnōsis*) about the ultimate nature of reality and how to live accordingly. In terms of practice, *sophia* refers to the ability of those claiming to be philosophers (i.e., "lovers of *sophia*"), sophists, sages, or prophets to mediate and communicate such ideas in a rhetorically skillful or otherwise convincing manner, the success of which would be evident in the accumulation of a following and financial and material support from benefactors.

In consequence, wisdom in both its aspects — content and practice — tends to be hierarchical and discriminatory. It divides those who have the upbringing, learning, and leisure to pursue it from those who do not, and it divides those who follow one sophist or sage from those who follow another. Insofar as this kind of wisdom reinforces the hierarchical, patriarchal, and factional nature of ancient society as a whole, it is conservative of the status quo and, in some of its expressions, quite pessimistic. On the other hand, to the extent that a particular tradition places its emphasis on revelation and inspiration, there is the possibility that wisdom of a more innovative and even countercultural kind may take shape. But this can be just as divisive in its own way and therefore just as conformist to wider cultural dynamics — when, as in the Corinthian fellowship, for example, those claiming to be "wise" or "spiritual" or "strong" set themselves apart from the rest. It is little wonder, therefore, that Paul strives so hard to wean the Corinthians onto a different understanding, where *wisdom is problematized and reinterpreted* by being set in the context of God's saving work in Christ at the end of time.

God's Foolishness Displayed in the Crucified Messiah (1:18-25)

Paul's first point, therefore, has to do with the *content* of the gospel. The language Paul uses is that of apocalyptic eschatology, typical of which is a series of striking antinomies designed to show that the new order of things is discontinuous with the old and turns previous wisdom on its head. Wisdom is now "foolishness," and the "foolishness" of the message of the cross is now "the power of God" (*dynamis tou theou*). This is such an astonishingly paradoxical inversion of the normal way of see-

ing things that for the first time in the letter Paul invokes scriptural testimony to support his understanding of God's judgment on "the wisdom of the wise" (1:19); and it is highly significant that the Scripture Paul quotes (Isa 29:14) occurs in a context which refers specifically to those in Israel who "draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips" (Isa 29:13). True wisdom, in other words, is not to be found in weighty words pronounced by gifted speakers. It is something hidden and paradoxical, a kind of "foolishness": it is certainly not a subject for boasting.

Furthermore, humanity is divided in this scheme of things, not between Jews and Greeks — the normal way of seeing humankind, in Judaism especially — or between rich and poor, but between people who are seen now in eschatological terms as those "who are perishing" and those "who are being saved" (1:18, 23-24). On the side of "this age" or "the world" are the wise: in Jewish terms, those learned in the Torah ("the scribe"); in Greek terms, those skilled in rhetoric ("the debater"). On the other side are simply "those who believe" (vv. 20-21). Set over against the expectation of the Jews that the Messiah would perform "signs" like those done by Moses, what Paul offers is a sign of a very different kind: a crucified Messiah who, as the contradiction of Jewish eschatological hope, is a "stumbling block" (*skandalon*). Likewise, over against the quest of the Gentiles for *sophia*, the wisdom Paul offers is the opposite in human terms, something quite irrational amounting almost to madness (cf. Hengel 1977). But Paul's frame of reference is not what is constituted by human ways of seeing. His is a biblical frame of reference, whose transcendental focus is conveyed best in terms that are highly paradoxical: "For God's foolishness [i.e., the event of the cross] is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (v. 25).

God's Foolishness Displayed in the Identity of Those Called (1:26-31)

Paul's second point complements the first. If the content of the gospel is evidence of the contradiction of conventional wisdom, so are its recipients. For instead of being the preserve of the cultural elite, the wisdom of God finds its embodiment in a startlingly motley fellowship of people: "not many of you were wise (*sophoi*) by human standards, not many were powerful (*dynatoi*), not many of noble birth (*eugeneis*)" (1:26). This is not the most flattering way of characterizing the addressees. But it is not meant to be! Paul is trying to help the Corinthian Christians to see that their own identity as a socially and ethnically mixed group drawn mainly (though not entirely) from the bottom end of the social scale is itself a powerful testimony to God's gracious "call" (v. 26; cf. v. 2) — to the fact that in the cross of Christ God is doing something totally new which turns human values and social patterns upside down (Pickett 1997).

The language Paul uses is thoroughly biblical and the concept that of eschatological reversal. In the background are the doctrines of creation and election: "God chose what is foolish . . . God chose what is weak . . . God chose what is low and despised . . . things that are not . . ."

(1:28). This is a statement of radical grace to a creation unable to help itself. It implies that human pride and competitive achievement are to be the basis for personal identity and sociability no longer. The anthropocentrism which pervades the Hellenistic cultural values of Corinth and sets human beings at odds with each other in a perpetual contest for dominance is placed under God's judgment and electing grace. In its place are set the three great blessings of being in covenant relationship with God — righteousness, sanctification and redemption — found now in Christ crucified as the wisdom of God "for us" (i.e., for our salvation) (1:30). And with a flourish, Paul ends this step in his argument with his second appeal to Scripture (v. 31), this time to Jeremiah's oracle of judgment on Israel, the terms of which resonate with Paul's own words to the Corinthians: "Thus says the LORD: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD" (Jer 9:23-24).

Incidentally, the fact that the Jeremiah text has shaped Paul's argument here (cf. also 1 Sam 2:10, LXX) urges caution on attempts — of which there are many (see, e.g., Theissen 1982: 69-119; and differently, Meggitt 1998: 75-154) — to draw firm conclusions from 1:26-28 about the socioeconomic status of the Corinthian believers. Paul is not concerned to offer sociological information but to engage in theological persuasion scripturally informed. Paul's language here and elsewhere certainly reflects his sensitivity to questions of rank and status, along with the associated values of honor and shame, but only insofar as this allows him to show how the gospel of the Crucified One and the church of the "low and despised" presuppose a different order of things altogether: "God is creating a new eschatological community out of unimpressive material precisely in order to exemplify the power of his own unmerited grace. Thus, the social composition of the church is an outward and visible sign of God's paradoxical wisdom" (Hays 1999: 116-17).

God's Foolishness Displayed in Paul's Weakness as a Preacher (2:1-5)

This leads to Paul's third point. If the "shameful" content of the gospel and the social insignificance of its recipients show that the wisdom of God is incompatible with wisdom conventionally understood, then so does the style in which the gospel message was communicated to them. So he says: "I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom . . . [but] I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (2:1, 3). In the competitive, display-oriented culture of Greco-Roman Corinth, Paul's self-confessed lack of rhetorical prowess and personal presence (cf. 2 Cor 10:10) is a damaging admission (cf. Pogoloff 1992; Litfin 1994). Who would want to associate with someone so lacking in the expected qualities of display and domination? But with a certain rhetorical finesse, Paul turns this weakness in his favor. On the one hand, his weakness (for elaborations of which see 1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:30; 12:7-10) is congruent with the gospel he

preaches ("Jesus Christ and him crucified," 2:2), to which the Corinthians themselves have responded. On the other, it allows the Spirit and power of God to show through in such a way that the Corinthians can be confident that their faith is grounded in God alone (vv. 4-5).

Significantly, Paul's argument ends as it began. In 1:18 he identifies the central paradox of the Christian faith: that the message of the cross is "the power of God." As an effective *inclusio*, he finishes on the same note: the basis of Christian faith is not human wisdom but "the power of God" (2:5). Where the Corinthians think in terms drawn too much from the pagan society around them, Paul argues in terms set by the Scriptures and God's covenant with Israel. Where the Corinthians' thinking is primarily anthropocentric, Paul seeks to convert them to think (and act) in terms centered on God.

Wisdom Reinterpreted (2:6-3:4)

But if the gospel of the Crucified One cannot be accommodated to conventional wisdom in either content or form, that does not mean that aspects of wisdom may not be amenable to *reinterpretation in the light of the gospel* (cf. Stuhlmacher 1987). This is so especially of that type of (Hellenistic-Jewish) wisdom according to which saving knowledge comes by revelation through the Spirit and Spirit-inspired intermediaries. Indeed, given what appears to be the high regard for wisdom and the gifts of the Spirit in Corinth — a regard no doubt inspired in part by Paul himself in the period of his earlier teaching ministry there and subsequently strengthened by the teaching of Apollos — it was almost incumbent upon Paul to balance his criticism of wisdom with a reappropriation of wisdom differently understood. Otherwise, instead of "gaining" his fellow believers for a fuller commitment to the gospel by building upon what was right in their beliefs and practices (cf. 1 Cor 9:19-23), he might have offended them unnecessarily or even alienated them from the fellowship (Chadwick 1954-55).

This helps to explain the next step in what Paul writes, where he develops his argument by saying, "Yet among the mature (*en tois teleiois*) we do speak wisdom . . . God's wisdom, secret and hidden [lit. a wisdom of God hidden in a mystery], which God decreed before the ages for our glory" (2:6-7). Paul is not here building up what he earlier tore down in 1:18-2:5. Nor is he being purely ironic, even if there are ironic touches. Rather, he seems to be taking over the language favored by the Corinthians — words like "wisdom," "the mature" and "the infants," "the spiritual" and "the unspiritual," "milk" and "solid food" — and investing it with new meaning arising out of the gospel. The character of this reinterpreted wisdom is laid out carefully and in a series of (either explicit or implied) contrasts, since Paul does not want to have any confusion between worldly wisdom and eschatological wisdom.

First, eschatological wisdom is quite other than the wisdom "of this age" which led the transient rulers "of this age" — note the repetition — to crucify the Messiah (2:6-8). Given that rulers and others of high status are understood in antiquity as people of wisdom, Paul's distinction here is quite pointed. Second, it is not a wisdom

of appearance and performance, but a "secret and hidden wisdom" known previously only to God but now imparted by means of a revelation (v. 7). Third, rather than being philosophical and rhetorical, it is eschatological and soteriological in tenor, its purpose being to enable believers to share in the glory of God in accordance with God's prevenient will (vv. 7, 9). Fourth, it is mediated to all believers not through "the spirit of the world" but through the Spirit of God (vv. 10-13). Fifth, it is imparted in fulfillment of the Scriptures (vv. 9, 16). It is not, therefore, a curious novelty sprung from nowhere without credentials; rather, it springs from God's covenant love for those who are his. Sixth, it requires discernment: it is therefore hidden from those who are "unspiritual" or "natural" (*psychikos*) and received as from God by those who are "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*) — that is, those who have received the Spirit (*to pneuma*) (vv. 14-15). Finally, its effect is not to divide into competing schools of thought and practice but to unify and consolidate in a new identity and epistemology: "But we have the mind of Christ" (v. 16).

Although in the history of Christianity this passage (2:6-16) has often been taken as the scriptural basis for a doctrine and practice which distinguish levels of spiritual maturity among believers, it is important to point out that such an interpretation is more in line with the kind of elitism which Paul is trying to counter! For the "wisdom" of the cross which Paul commends is not one that separates believer from believer; it is, rather, what separates believer from unbeliever (and from those in the church who think and act like unbelievers). That is why Paul makes such heavy use of the first person plural here (cf. vv. 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 16), whereby the "we" whom God has called are set apart from those who belong to "this age." It is also why the basic contrast (at vv. 2:10-13) is between those who have the Spirit of God (i.e., believers) and those who do not (i.e., unbelievers). Paul's whole point is that, whereas worldly wisdom creates division, rivalry, and violence, the gospel of "Christ crucified" is a wisdom of a different kind, the eschatological revelation of the power of God which brings into being a people united in the Spirit and blessed with the gifts of the Spirit.

Until the Corinthians accept this, the self-styled "spiritual ones" (*hoi pneumatikoi*) are, in Paul's eyes, no more than "fleshly ones" (*hoi sarkinoi*), "infants" (*nēpioi*) in Christ, people who can be fed not solids (as they expected) but only milk (3:2)! All of which brings Paul back to his fundamental, "practical-theological" concern (cf. 1:10-17), namely, the threat to the unity of the church posed by a "wisdom" ideology which (because it is "individualistic") fosters party spirit (3:3-4). The irony, then, is that those who boast in their spiritual prowess have nothing to boast about, for in boasting they show only their immaturity — how much they still live according to the wisdom of "this age."

Leadership and Church Growth Reinterpreted (3:5-23)

Having shown that wisdom has to be reinterpreted in the light of the cross, Paul now proceeds to draw out further the implications for Corinthian factionalism: if true wisdom is identified as the revelation of God in the cross

of Christ, then all human boasting, including boasting in the leadership of one apostle or teacher over another, is precluded (cf. 1:29-31). Using agricultural and architectural metaphors well known in the political rhetoric of his day (Mitchell 1992: 99-111), Paul seeks to shift the orientation of the Corinthians' social thought and practice in a radically theocentric and christocentric direction: away from divisive attachments to mere humans like Apollos or Paul or Cephas (3:5, 21; cf. 4:6) to common devotion to God and his Christ.

The first metaphor is of the Corinthian believers as "God's field" (3:5-9). This word picture, with its unitary understanding of the church as a single field and its biblical overtones of the metaphor of Israel as God's vineyard (e.g., Isa 5:1-7), allows Paul to clarify how the Corinthians are to regard their apostolic teachers in particular. Above all, they are characterized by *what they have in common*: they are both God's "servants" (*diakonoi*); their respective roles of "planting" (Paul) and "watering" (Apollos), although different, are not in conflict since both are God-given; the parts they play, although significant, are not worth boasting about since after all it is God (as Creator) who causes the Corinthians to "grow"; the parts they play are not at odds since their planting and watering has a common purpose (lit. "they are one," 3:8), and they will both be rewarded according to common criteria; and their relation to each other is as "fellow workers" — a favorite ecclesiological term of Paul's stressing unity and cooperation (cf. 2 Cor 1:24; 8:23; Phil 2:25; 4:3; 1 Thess 3:2; etc.). But most important of all, both the apostolic laborers and the field itself belong to God, something reiterated in every sentence and climaxing with the threefold genitive: "For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building" (3:9).

The reference to "God's building" allows a shift to a second metaphor, this time an architectural one (3:10-15). In fact, Paul has a marked preference for architectural metaphors for the church, not least in 1 Corinthians (cf. 3:16-17; 6:19; 8:1; 10:23; 14:3-5, 12, 17, 26; 15:58; 16:13), for they allow him to explore what makes possible the "building up" (*oikodomē*) of the Corinthians' common life in the face of strong forces which threaten to tear it apart. In this first instance of the metaphor, Paul turns from characterizing himself and Apollos to what is going on in the church, developing at the same time the motif of the divine reward or retribution (*misthos*) which God will bestow on his servants at the Day of Judgment (3:8b). Thus, having identified himself in his apostolic role as "like a skilled (*sophos*) master builder" who "by the grace of God" laid the foundation, Paul proceeds to a serious warning to those (unidentified) people who are building upon it. His warning is twofold. First, and most importantly, there is only one firm foundation: "that foundation is Jesus Christ" (v. 11). Second, those — Paul is referring no doubt to those in Corinth who exalt "wisdom," along with its corollaries and consequences — who build upon that foundation with building materials unsuited to its true nature will be judged by God (vv. 12-15).

As to the form that judgment will take, the biblical "fire" imagery Paul uses here compares well with that in Mal 4:1-2a. Paul's concern is not to impart precise in-

struction on "the doctrine of judgment." Rather, in line with the architectural metaphor, and drawing upon the vivid imagery of fiery judgment available to him from scriptural and apocalyptic traditions, he is recalling the Corinthians to the christological and eschatological realities in terms of which he wants them to practice their common life (cf. also 4:5). Those who build on Christ worthily — that is, with the "gold, silver, and precious stones" which in biblical times were used to build the temple (cf. 1 Chr 22:14, 16; 29:2) and which are able to withstand eschatological testing — will be rewarded; but those who build unworthily — that is, with the "wood, hay, and straw" of anthropocentric wisdom vulnerable to eschatological testing — will be judged.

This leads Paul to speak in terms of a third, climactic metaphor, also architectural, but this time of a more specialized kind: the church as God's "temple" — or, more precisely, "sanctuary," since *naos* is used rather than *hieros* (3:16-17). By virtue of its indelible associations with the biblical ideas of the presence of God with Israel and of the temple as an eschatological reality, this metaphor allows Paul to move from talking about types of leadership and practices of community formation to the nature of the community itself. Against the social and religious background of his day, with Gentiles worshiping in temples dedicated variously to a pantheon of gods and Jews worshiping "the one, true God" in the temple in Jerusalem or constituting themselves as an "alternative temple" at Qumran, what Paul says is extraordinary: "Do you [plural] not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (v. 16). What Paul wants this motley, mixed (and mixed-up!) group to see is that, together, they constitute nothing less than that holy place and/or people where God is present, now at the end of time, as Spirit. The main point is not a general polemic against other claims concerning where God dwells (of the kind found, e.g., in John 4:16-26). Rather, it is a specific corrective to claims by the self-styled "spiritual ones" (*hoi pneumatikoi*) in the fellowship that they alone possess the Spirit. To such as these, Paul reiterates and elaborates the eschatological warning of the immediately preceding verses: God will judge those who destroy (by their "boasting" and rivalry) the fellowship of the believers in Corinth who are "God's building . . . God's temple" (3:9, 16). God will do so because his temple is "holy" (*hagios*), and the Corinthians in their common identity and common life founded on Christ crucified are that holy temple (v. 17).

In the light of this warning, Paul now brings the argument begun in 1:18 to a preliminary, but powerful, conclusion (3:18-23). First, in words which recall the argument of 1:18-2:16, he returns to the issue that is threatening to destroy the holy edifice of the Corinthian fellowship: the "wisdom of this world" (3:18-20). "Let no one deceive himself," says Paul. The time has come for self-examination, discernment, and discipline. To be truly wise, those who style themselves "wise" have to become fools. Why? Because, in the light of the folly of the cross (1:18), worldly wisdom is "foolishness with God." And, as on previous occasions (cf. 1:19, 31; 2:9, 16), Paul caps his argument with an appeal to the Scriptures — this time, a twofold citation from the Writings (Job 5:13 and

Ps 94:11) common to which is the theme of God's judgment on human wisdom.

Then he addresses the related issue (cf. 3:1-9) of how the quest for wisdom leads to divisive "boasting" in human leaders rather than in God (vv. 21-23). The argument here is rhetorical and ironic. It is as if Paul is saying: Why boast about human leaders and subject yourself to one or another in factions ("I belong to Paul . . . Apollos . . . Cephas") when you should be united? For, as you so-called "wise" already know, "all things belong to you" — not just Paul or Apollos or Cephas but also the world, life, death, the present, and the future (v. 22)! And why do "all things belong to you" (v. 22b)? Because — and Paul comes to a wonderful doxological climax here — "you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God" (v. 23). The tragic irony from Paul's viewpoint is that the Corinthians' notion of wisdom, being fundamentally anthropocentric, is too narrow, its horizon too low. Set against a christological and theological horizon, however, things look different, including wisdom itself. Now the claim of the wise person (common also in Stoic and Cynic philosophy) to "possess all things" (cf. 8:1a) is true in ways about which the wise could never have dreamed: because of the saving revelation of a different kind of wisdom — the wisdom of God in the cross of Christ.

Apostleship Reinterpreted (4:1-21)

But Paul has not finished. If he has addressed the ways in which the wisdom ideology in Corinth has divided one group from another within the church itself, now he has to confront the ways in which it has divided the church from its apostle: Paul himself. What follows, then, is direct censure of the Corinthians, as of children by a parent (4:14-15, 21; cf. 3:1-2). And however painful it may have been for Paul to write and the Corinthians to receive, it provides us with unparalleled access to Paul's apostolic self-understanding — to the way in which Paul defines the nature of apostolic authority and exercises it at the same time.

The problem to which Paul is responding surfaces immediately, in 4:1-5. Paul is being "judged" — that is, in the overall game of "boasting" he is being compared unfavorably with other leader figures, most likely Apollos (his more rhetorically sophisticated "fellow worker") in particular (cf. 3:4-6, 22; 4:6). So his authority is at stake, and, along with that, the gospel and the unity of the church. Paul's response is, yet once more, theological and eschatological. Whereas the Corinthians see things primarily in terms of the human and the present, Paul offers them a vision which is transcendental.

First and most importantly, he tries to reorient the Corinthians' understanding of apostleship by offering an alternative way in which both he and Apollos should be regarded: they are not faction-leading *sophoi* after the Corinthian wisdom model but something far more significant — "servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries"; and what is required of them is not personal presence in front of their fellows on the human plane but trustworthiness in relation to Christ their heavenly Lord (4:1-2). This means, second, that the judgment of his apostleship is not the business of any human tribunal; so (while observing

nevertheless that he has a clear conscience) Paul refuses even to judge himself (v. 3b). Rather, the only judgment that matters is eschatological. Therefore, no one will be his (and by implication, their) judge but God alone through the agency of the coming Lord (vv. 4-5).

Now, in 4:6-13, comes the censure in its most direct form. Previously (says Paul) he has been referring what he has been saying about church life to himself and Apollos (e.g., 3:5-7; 4:1) in order to teach by their example (of concord and cooperative action) the lesson of the epigram, "Nothing beyond what is written" (4:6a) — a conciliatory principle well known in ancient politics, referring to an agreement between two or more parties as a basis for reconciliation and harmonious relationship (Welborn 1997: 43-76). Hence the purpose clause which follows: "so that none of you will be puffed up (*physiousthe*) in favor of one against another" (4:6b). The verb "puffed up" occurs here for the first, but by no means the last, time (cf. 4:18-19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4). It refers to what lies at the heart of the Corinthians' problems: the spiritual "inflation" of some (at least) in the church and its divisive consequences, including "boasting" and factional attachment to one apostle over and in opposition to another. The implication that the Corinthians have not learned (the practice of concord) leads to the devastating question of v. 7, to the effect: "Who do you think you are, anyway?" (so Fee 1987: 171). The Corinthians boast of the spiritual possessions they have received; but if they are gifts, what have they to boast about?

The threat to church unity posed by their immature boasting and partisanship is so great that it is time now for confrontation and parent-like admonition. The instrument Paul uses is irony. The irony is built around the well-known rhetorical practice of comparison (*synkrisis*) in which, in the competition between factions, one *sophos* is compared with another to establish who is superior (cf. Mitchell 1992: 219-21). In Paul's admonition, the spiritual exaltation of the Corinthians is compared and contrasted with the material and physical humiliation of their apostle. To assist in his argument, Paul uses a particular rhetorical trope: the catalogue of sufferings (*peristaseis*) cited to demonstrate the integrity and honor of the wise man and the truth of his teaching (cf. Fitzgerald 1988). Paul's purpose is twofold. On the one hand, to confront the Corinthians, in the light of the suffering of *their own* apostles (i.e., Paul himself and Apollos), with the superficiality and destructiveness of the worldly wisdom they espouse; and on the other, to provide them with an alternative and even more honorable example to imitate (cf. 4:16), the consequence of which would be to increase their solidarity with each other and their unity under the apostolic leadership of Paul himself.

The ironic comparison runs from 4:8 to 13 and is tightly organized (in groups of three) for rhetorical effect. First, the Corinthians — reflecting, perhaps, a sense that, because they have "arrived" spiritually, they have become true *sophoi* — boast of their spiritual satiety, wealth, and kingship. By comparison, all Paul can point to, in what is effectively the theme of this section, is how "God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death . . . a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mort-

als" (vv. 8-9). Then comes a second sequence, this time of contrasting pairs, again in a threesome: "We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute" (v. 10). Finally, there comes a catalogue devoted solely to the apostles themselves: "To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty and poorly clothed, and beaten and homeless and weary from the work of our own hands . . ." (vv. 11-13). The use once more of threesomes (apart from the concluding summation) and careful bracketing ("To the present hour . . . to this very day") create a climactic effect and help to make Paul's most important point: *this* is the nature of a truly apostolic existence and, as such, it should be the model for Christian life in Corinth also! If the Corinthians ask why it is truly apostolic, Paul's answer, by analogy with what he has said earlier (in 1:18-2:5), is: because it conforms with the revelation of divine wisdom in the crucified Christ.

What this passage reveals about the nature of Paul's apostolic existence invites special attention (cf. Hock 1980; Meggitt 1998: 75-97), for here we have — admittedly in a rhetorical form — unique autobiographical testimony. The picture we get is one of overwhelming hardship, poverty, and vulnerability, augmented by the humiliations associated with ostracism, punishment, and persecution (4:11-13). The language Paul uses is very strong, especially in a milieu sensitive to considerations of personal honor and shame (Moxnes 1996). The other catalogues of suffering bear this picture out (cf. 2 Cor 4:8-9; 6:3-10; 11:23-29; 12:10), as does the testimony of Acts (e.g., 13:44-52; 14:1-7, 19-20; 16:19-40). No wonder that boasting (except ironically and subversively) is excluded! For the reality is nothing to boast about. In human terms, the reality is existence at the level of a slave (cf. 9:19), with an untimely and degrading death the only certainty. This is sobering; but it is also the basis for a claim to honor of a different kind. In particular, it casts apostleship and (by extension) church leadership and Christian discipleship *in the light of the cross of Christ* — something those in Corinth who boast in their superiority and the superiority of their apostle find almost impossible to acknowledge.

What Paul says next (4:14-21) concludes both the direct admonition and the first section of his argument in the letter as a whole (1:18-4:21). His words are intended to be reassuring and firm at the same time: "I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children" (4:14). His authority for so doing is then made clear. Although the Corinthians may have "countless guardians," they do not have "many fathers," since he alone "fathered" them "in Christ Jesus" through the preaching of the gospel (v. 15). The metaphor of pater- nity here is significant and is part of a wider network of metaphors of parenting and nurturing which Paul uses elsewhere (e.g., 3:1-2; cf. 1 Thess 2:7b, 11-12). In the context of patriarchy in antiquity, it is a metaphor of authority with its consequent rights and responsibilities (cf. Pilch 1993). Its function here is basically threefold: to unify (as under one "father") a group behaving like quarrelsome children; to insure a hospitable reception for Paul's "beloved and faithful child" Timothy, sent to remind them of Paul's teaching and example (4:17); and

also to underpin Paul's implied threat to come to discipline them (4:21) — something quite consonant with traditional wisdom teaching about the role of a father toward his children (cf. Sir 30:1-13).

At the heart of this concluding section is the command, "Be imitators of me" (4:16). It is introduced by the significant words, "I appeal to you," words which unite the end of this first part of Paul's argument with the beginning (1:10). There Paul appealed for unity; here Paul shows how unity will be attained — by the *imitation* of their fatherly apostle. Not for the last time, Paul puts himself forward as a model to be imitated, an example to follow (see 11:1; cf. also 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14). If this were arrogance on Paul's part (as some take it to be), then Paul would be undermining the very attitudes and practices he is trying to counteract. But it is something quite different (cf. Witherington 1995: 145-46 *contra* Castelli 1991). First, imitation of the wise man was recognized by contemporary moralists (like Plutarch and Seneca) as a basic way of learning wisdom; so the command to self-imitation was the *duty* of a responsible father, teacher, and leader. Second, Paul has made clear already in the "catalogue of suffering" the sacrificial nature of his apostolic lifestyle and practice; so imitation is a matter of learning, not to rule but to serve (cf. 3:5; 4:1), and it is intended for the advantage not of the few but of the many (cf. 10:31-11:1). Congruent with this, and as becomes explicit in 11:1, the imitation of Paul is of a quite particular kind: its focus is not Paul *per se* but Paul as himself an "imitator of Christ."

Finally, Paul turns to his own anticipated visit (cf. also 16:5-9). In context, this is to be understood as like the visit of a father to his children. Implied is the idea that (like the parousia of Christ) the coming of the apostle will be a time for judgment, reward, and punishment. The judgment will involve the testing of what lies at the heart of the opposition to Paul in Corinth (cf. 1:17; 2:1-5) — *logos* (i.e., worldly wisdom rhetorically displayed), as defined by those he calls the "arrogant ones" (4:18, 19; cf. 4:6). What Paul will be looking for, however, is not worldly wisdom but power (*dynamis*) as a manifestation of the eschatological reality of "the kingdom of God" (4:20; cf. 6:9-10; 15:24, 50). This is a clear warning to those who are "acting up." The choice is theirs: "What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?" (4:21). The "stick" is a symbol, not (as we moderns might think) of physical abuse, but of parental authority (over adult children as well as infants) and the duty of discipline. But Paul's own preference is clearly for "love in a spirit of gentleness." That is consistent with his advocacy of the way of love elsewhere in the letter as the best way both to overcome strife and division and to "build up" the Corinthians' common life (cf. 8:1; 13:1-13; 14:1; 16:14, 24).

Preserving the Holiness of the Church (5:1-11:1)

We have seen in the first major section of the letter (1:18-4:21) that Paul grapples with the threat to the church's common life arising from Corinthian factionalism, itself

a manifestation of a particular, anthropocentric ideal of "wisdom." He does so by showing how God's call to be the new covenant people requires the radical transformation of wisdom in the light of the gospel, an argument he advances in both fundamental theological terms and by appeal to exemplary apostolic practice. The second major section (5:1-11:1) takes this argument a stage further. Here Paul deals with particular problems in the church's life which have come to his attention (cf. 5:1; 7:1), problems related primarily to the nature of Christian existence in the world. These he confronts, not as isolated "pastoral problems," but as specific manifestations of the same basic issue: *the transformation of individual and corporate life which living according to the gospel requires.*

To put it another way, it is not the case that chs. 1-4 lay the theological "foundations" and chs. 5-11 (or 5-16) constitute the ethical "application." It is impossible to separate Paul's theology and ethics in this way. Indeed, it is misleading and, in its tendency to reduce theology to a kind of disembodied "spiritual insight," probably has more in common with the kind of position in Corinth to which Paul is opposed. But why is it misleading? First, such a distinction is alien to the way Paul argues, where, as 1 Corinthians shows from beginning to end, talk of God and the practices of life are intertwined inextricably with a view to encouraging and shaping a *whole way of life* (cf. Engberg-Pedersen 1987). Second, such a distinction distorts our understanding of what Paul says. For example, cut off from the vocation to be the faithful people of God, what Paul says about (what we call) "sexual morality" (in 1 Corinthians 5-7) is in danger of being interpreted as a matter of personal morality in the realm of private behavior when, as we shall see, it is a matter of social morality and public witness.

The subjects Paul deals with in this section are basically twofold: how to avoid "sexual immorality" (*porneia*) (1 Corinthians 5-7) and how to avoid idolatry (*idōlōlatría*) (1 Corinthians 8-10). These at first sight unrelated topics are in fact related closely, both to what Paul has said in 1 Corinthians 1-4 and to each other (cf. Mitchell 1992: 225-28). They relate to what has come before, in that sexual immorality and idolatry — apparently tolerated or at least understood differently within the more cosmopolitan "wisdom" of the Corinthians — constitute fundamental threats to the unity and growth of the Christian fellowship which Paul is doing his utmost to preserve (cf. 1:10). They relate to each other in that, within the tradition and logic of biblical law and Israelite life, avoidance of sexual immorality and idolatry is paradigmatic of what it means to be Israel, God's faithful covenant people who refrain from "whoring" after other gods (cf. Jer 3:1-5; Ezekiel 16; 23; Hos 4:12; 5:4; also Rosner 1994: 126-37). Furthermore, within the context of Paul's argument in the letter as a whole, Paul's aim in 5:1-11:1 is to encourage a marriage discipline and a cultic discipline which will strengthen both the internal cohesion of the church and the boundaries between the church and society at large (cf. Meeks 1983: 84-107). The effect of this, in turn, will be intramural and extramural: it will strengthen the unity of the church itself, and it will strengthen the witness of the church to those outside.

Marriage Discipline and the Holiness of the Church (5:1-7:40)

In 5:1-7:40, Paul addresses a range of issues: a case of incest in the fellowship (5:1-13); the practice of taking private disputes before the public courts (6:1-11); the practice of consorting with prostitutes (6:12-20); and matters relating to singleness and marriage (7:1-40). Several factors link these apparently disparate issues together. They all have to do with (1) real or potential threats to the unity and growth of the church posed by members' behavior; (2) the avoidance of *porneia* and related sins (cf. 5:1, 9-11; 6:13, 18; 7:2); (3) the "crisis of authority" in Corinth provoked by those who are "puffed up" (cf. 5:2), not least, against Paul (so Fee 1987: 194-96); and (4) regulating the boundaries of the church in such a way as to make possible, for the good of the church, the clear identification of "who's in" and "who's out."

Responding to Sex-Rule Transgression in the Church (5:1-13)

Paul turns first to a case of some notoriety: "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality (*porneia*) among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans [i.e., Gentiles]; for a man is living with his father's wife. And you are arrogant!" (5:1-2a). Behind Paul's acute anxiety here lie both biblical law prohibiting incest ("Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife"; Deut 27:20; cf. Lev 18:8; 20:11) and prohibitions in Greco-Roman society at large (for details of which see Talbert 1987: 12-14). In relation to these prohibitions, it is clear that the offender has placed himself outside the bounds both of God's covenant with Israel as inscribed in Torah and of wider societal norms. To use Paul's own terms (cf. 10:32), he has become a cause of offense to both Jews and Greeks.

Interestingly, Paul does not dwell in his response on the sexual nature of the sin (as if it were just a matter of individual morality) but on its social character and consequences and how the society of Christians is to respond. This is characteristic of the more general point that *Paul's sexual ethics are part of his social ethics*. For Paul, the incest threatens the boundary between the church and the world. Along with the "arrogance" and "boasting" (5:2, 6) which accompany it and which reveal a lamentable vacuum in the authority of the community, the incest represents a very serious invasion of the church by destructive practices associated for Paul with demonic forces (cf. v. 5) which could undermine church life as a whole.

Thus radical surgery on the Corinthian body corporate is required. Four times Paul drives home the action he wants carried out: the offender is to be expelled from the fellowship (5:2, 5, 7, 13). This is to be done in a responsible manner in the formal gathering of believers acting (with a proper, quasi-judicial authority and with the apostle present in spirit) to ratify the decision already made by the apostle (5:3-5). Nor is any explicit provision made for the forgiveness and restitution of the offender (although cf. 2 Cor 2:5-11; also Matt 18:15-35; John 20:23). It is as if the sin of *porneia* is so serious a threat to the harmonious life and good reputation of the Christian fel-

lowship that permanent exclusion is the only solution. It may also be that the offender is a man of wealth and status, a patron and benefactor — one of the “strong” perhaps (cf. 4:10) — whose influence, were he readmitted, is likely to be detrimental (cf. Chow 1992: 130–41; Clarke 1993: 89–107). Not that the intention of the disciplinary action is retributive only: Paul’s perspective is consistently eschatological — “you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (5:5). This implies that any restitution, if it happens at all, is left to God: by expelling the man from the church into Satan’s sphere of influence, the man’s inclination to sin (his “flesh”) will be destroyed and his life (“spirit”), thus purified, will be saved at the Day of Judgment (cf. 1 Tim 1:20).

The disciplinary action is directed not just at the individual offender, however. His failure is shared by the Corinthians as a whole on account of their easy tolerance of the incestuous relation in their midst, a tolerance which has made them complicitous. Hence: “Your boasting (*kauchēma*) is not a good thing” (5:6a; cf. 3:21; 4:7). Their attachment to “the wise” has blocked them from perceiving the threat to their common life posed by the contagious *porneia* in their midst. Their individualistic understanding of Christian freedom (*eleutheria*) (cf. 6:12; 10:29) has blunted their responsible exercise of moral discrimination. As a corrective, therefore, Paul offers (stern) fatherly instruction from the Scriptures and Jewish liturgy. The Corinthians are to see themselves in the light of the Passover, itself the biblical paradigm of true freedom (5:6–8). They are the batch of dough for the Passover bread from which every bit of leaven has to be excluded (cf. Exod 12:15). What is more, they have been marked out as God’s chosen people by the sacrifice of Christ, “our paschal lamb” (cf. Exod 12:3–7). So they are to live as God’s chosen people, not with “malice and evil,” but with “sincerity and truth.”

Finally, he reminds them of instruction he has given in a previous letter (which instruction some have identified with 2 Cor 6:14–7:1) on the importance of not “mixing” with people who are sexually immoral (5:9). But now he introduces a qualification: “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral. . . . Do not even eat with such a one” (vv. 10–11). In terms of Paul’s boundary-marking concern, this qualification is significant. Paul is drawing a boundary around the fellowship by drawing a line through it, as if to say: “Once you get your internal relations sorted out, the external ones will take care of themselves.”

Interestingly, in contrast to the Qumran Covenanters who separated themselves from their fellow Jews and went to live in the desert, Paul does not advocate wholesale separation, even from Gentiles. For Paul, it is important neither to go “out of the world” (like the Qumran sect) nor to become the world (by tolerating the presence in the fellowship of a notoriously immoral person). What is important is to live counterculturally in the world as a “mixed” society of a different kind: where Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, strong and weak constitute together God’s new people, those whom he will describe later on as “the body of Christ” (12:27).

In sum, Paul’s concern is to strengthen the unity of this radically new kind of society (the church) by clarifying its boundaries and empowering it to remove serious anomalies. The list of those to be excluded extends beyond the immediate case and is worth noting: “anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber” (5:11; cf. v. 10). Here we note the linking of sexual immorality and idolatry which prepares the way for the transition later on (in 8:1–11:1) to the issue of “things offered to idols” (*eidōlothyta*). Significant also is the sequence, according to which reference to the sexually immoral person is followed by reference to the “greedy” (*pleonektēs*) person, a connection which may help to explain the transition to matters having to do with litigation in the courts in 6:1–11, as we shall see. Also important is the resonance of this list (noted by Rosner 1994: 68–70; also Hays 1997: 87–88) with passages in the book of Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 22:22) devoted to sins which call for capital punishment as the means to “purge the evil from your midst” (the same exclusion formula that Paul uses at the climax of his argument, in 5:13b). As with the lesson Paul draws from the symbolism of the Jewish Passover liturgy (vv. 6–8), the appeal here to vice lists which resonate with Israel’s scriptures shows once again how concerted is Paul’s attempt to convert the Corinthians to a different kind of wisdom expressive of a covenantal self-understanding and a holy lifestyle.

On Not Settling Private Disputes in Public (6:1–11)

Paul’s handling of the case of incest presupposes that marriage rules and the avoidance of *porneia* have a paradigmatic significance for the right ordering of a society’s (including the church’s) common life. It also presupposes that the church itself as God’s covenant people is called to exercise corporate responsibility for the correction and discipline of its members’ lives. Drawing proper lines through the church in the form of rules and ordered practices is a way of drawing proper boundaries around the church such that the identity and unity of the church are preserved while at the same time its openness and witness to the world are enabled.

This helps to explain the otherwise surprising shift Paul makes from the case of incest to the issue of taking private cases before the public courts. The main connection is this: if the case of incest involves Paul in bringing the Corinthians to take responsibility for their *internal* affairs by judging and expelling the offending member (cf. 5:12b–13a), then what are they doing taking any cases at all *outside* their own jurisdiction (6:1–11)? But there is another link. A plausible case can be made for the view that the case of the incestuous marriage involves not just a sexual tie but a *property* tie as well, having to do with matters of dowry and inheritance (cf. Chow 1992: 123–41). The offender is not only immoral but greedy; he has married for financial gain and the security and social advantage that go with it. In passing, this would explain why, in the lists of vices in 5:10 and 11, “sexual immorality” (i.e., marrying within the laws of prohibited degrees) is followed immediately by “greed.” It is not at all impossi-

ble, then, that the lawsuits referred to in 6:1-11 are related in some measure to conflicting property interests arising out of the case of incest and others like it.

It is significant, however, that Paul refrains from naming names and engaging with the details of particular cases — which is why, of course, attempts to reconstruct the precise situation have to remain tentative. What is important, from Paul's point of view, is how to enable the Corinthians, with reference to a larger theological and eschatological horizon, to evaluate and change their current practices for settling internal disputes in ways that will consolidate the authority and life of the church rather than undermine it. The way Paul does this is to argue that settling private disputes in public courts is a contradiction of who they are as believers and of what it means to be the church. It is to act as if being a Christian makes no difference to social practice; indeed, as if the church is just another sphere where worldly practices can be applied and personal advantage gained.

Thus, making deliberate use of scriptural language of separation and distinction, Paul does everything possible to persuade the Corinthians to see themselves differently: "When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the *unrighteous*, instead of taking it before the *saints*?" (6:1). As early as 1:2, Paul has addressed the Corinthians as people "called to be saints"; therefore (Paul implies), how can you make the absurd category mistake of submitting to the judgment of the *adikoi* ("unrighteous") and the *apistoi* ("unbelievers") (6:1, 6)? What is more, this lamentable lack of self-understanding is compounded by the limits of their eschatological understanding (vv. 2-3). The point here is not a matter of eschatology "in the abstract," however, but of the *authority* that their identity as "saints" and their eschatological hope bestow upon them. If they are saints and if they are to judge the world and angels, then why do they not exercise that authority already, in their own fellowship?

The issue is serious. Previously, Paul refrains from "shaming" them (4:14). But now he says, "I say this to your shame" (6:5a). The church's litigious disunity is threatening its unity as an eschatological family (or brotherhood) and compromising its witness to outsiders (cf. 14:23-25). What they should do in practice (Paul implies) is what is recommended in Scripture: appoint judges from among themselves to settle disputes (cf. Deut 1:9-18; 16:18-20). This was the practice at Qumran (cf. 1QS) and in the communities of the Jewish diaspora. It was common practice also in the cult groups and voluntary associations in the cities of the empire. That the Christians in Corinth have not adopted a similar practice shows how weak are its boundaries and sense of a common life.

But Paul goes one step further: "In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" (6:7-8). The radicalism of this challenge is easily overlooked. Lying behind what Paul says may be the well-known teaching of Socrates that it is better to suffer wrong than to do it: in which case the Corinthians are shown once again to be not as "wise" as they think they

are (Hays 1997: 95-96). But also in the background is the challenge of the "hidden wisdom" of Paul's own practice — "when reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly" (4:12-13) — practice itself in creative fidelity with that of the crucified Christ whom Paul preaches. So the Corinthians' behavior measures up neither to the best of pagan wisdom nor to the example of Paul in imitation of Christ. Rather, what Paul implies in 6:7-10 is that by having recourse to public litigation in the courts, the Corinthians inevitably get caught up in a system which (due to the baneful influence of patronage and bribery) is corrupt and corrupting (cf. Chow 1992: 123-30; Winter 1994: 105-21).

This leads to the severe eschatological warning that "wrongdoers (*adikoi*) will not inherit the kingdom of God" (6:9; cf. v. 10b). That is how seriously Paul takes the Corinthians' practice. By going outside the fellowship for justice, they are not only denying who (eschatologically speaking) they really are; they are also becoming perpetrators of injustice in a system which is corrupt, and therefore placing themselves outside the sphere of divine grace and salvation.

The list of *adikoi* ("unrighteous") in 6:10 compares closely with the lists occurring previously in 5:10 and 11. Noteworthy additions, especially in view of the appeal to these texts in Christian discussions of sexual morality (cf. Hays 1996: 379-406; Thiselton 1997), are "male prostitutes" (*malakoi*) and "sodomites" (*arsenokoitai*) (so NRSV). The precise meaning of these terms is disputed (Winter 1997a). *Malakoi* literally means "soft ones" and may refer to young boys in pederastic relationships with older men, or to males who play the "passive" (feminine) role in a homoerotic relation. *Arsenokoitai* occurs nowhere else in extant Greek texts prior to its occurrence here (and in 1 Tim 1:10); it is almost certainly a coinage drawn from Lev 18:22 and 20:13 in the LXX ("You shall not lie with a man as with a woman [*meta arsenos koiten gynaikos*]: it is an abomination"). It may be the antonym of *malakos* and refer to a male who plays an "active" (masculine) role in a homoerotic relation. Whatever the precise nuances, these additions clearly reflect the strong scriptural and Jewish condemnation of homoeroticism (cf. also Rom 1:24-27), a hostility shared by many in Roman society as well. Their significance here is that they constitute a way of characterizing those whose lawless behavior puts them outside the covenant community. In other words, the list is a *boundary marker* for people whose sense of boundaries is (from Paul's perspective) alarmingly weak. Its intention is to warn the Corinthians who they are in danger of becoming or reverting to (cf. 6:11a) if they get drawn (back) into public litigation and the culture surrounding it.

As a counterbalance, and to remind the Corinthians (once more — cf. 1:2, 30; 3:16-17) who they really are in virtue of their conversion and baptism, Paul states emphatically (with three strong "buts"): "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (6:11b). It is a climactic, theological, identity-transforming ending intended to act as a bulwark against the tendency of the Corinthians to revert to their old identity and former practices.

Sex-Rule Transgression Again (6:12-20)

To press home his argument, Paul turns to another practice of *porneia* which, like the case of incest and recourse to the public courts, threatens the ordered life and corporate responsibility of the church: recourse to prostitutes (for background on which see Ford 1993). That such a practice is tolerated in the church reflects the extent to which the sexual mores of the wider society continue to provide the norms for church members — especially Gentile males of means and leisure. In passing, the strong likelihood that Paul's argument in these and subsequent chapters is directed primarily (but not solely) at leading men in the church is worth noting, given the oft-made complaint about what Paul says to restrain the freedom of the Corinthian women later on (cf. 11:2-16; 14:33b-36). There as here, Paul's primary concern is the regulation and boundary maintenance of the church by the church and its apostle.

In a rhetorical style indebted to the diatribe, Paul begins by dealing with the slogans which have come to his attention, first quoting them (apparently approvingly) and then offering a further consideration which amounts to a qualification or correction (6:12-14; cf. other probable slogans in 7:1; 8:1, 4, 8; 10:23; 15:24). From what Paul says, we may infer that, in each case, the imagined interlocutors belong to the so-called "wise" and boast in a spiritual freedom which allows them to do whatever they like with their bodies. This "freedom" (*eleutheria*) may be a doctrine indebted to various philosophical schools, such as the Stoics and Epicureans. It may owe something also to an interpretation of Paul's own teaching on the believer's freedom from "the works of the law" (cf. Gal 3:10-14; and Dunn 1990: 215-41), an interpretation which, by its one-sided stress on new life "in the Spirit," leads in an antinomian (i.e., lawless) direction. Whatever the precise background, the consequences for the identity and authority of the community have been overlooked by the Corinthians, and a corrective is needed.

Hence, to those who say "all things are lawful," Paul replies, "but not all things are beneficial (*sympherei*)," that is, for the good of the individual or of the fellowship as a whole — a practical, community-building consideration common in the teaching of the sophists and used by Paul elsewhere (esp. 12:7). To those who reiterate, "all things are lawful," Paul replies (in the authoritative apostolic first person), "but I will not be dominated by anything"; that is, even if I have rights as a "free" person, I do not have to exercise them (especially if it is at some others' expense) — a point on which he will elaborate at length in 1 Corinthians 9. Then again, to those who say, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other," Paul replies, "The body is meant not for fornication (*porneia*) but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power"; that is, our resurrection faith — because it is founded upon the bodily resurrection of Christ (elaborated further in 1 Corinthians 15) — commits us to the ongoing moral value of embodied existence.

Paul drives this point home with three rhetorical questions beginning, "Do you not know . . . ?" (6:15, 16, 19), each of which takes further what it means to say that "the body is . . . for the Lord" (v. 13b). Underlying all three is the biblical notion of holiness. This becomes explicit with the metaphor of the body as a "temple of the Holy Spirit" in the third and final question (v. 19). Important in biblical holiness is the idea of not mixing categories which are incompatible (e.g., Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14; cf. Jenson 1992). That helps to explain the force of the first two questions. In the first, Paul asks, "If your bodies are members of Christ, how can you allow them to become members of a prostitute?" Here the Corinthians fail to take their relation to Christ seriously enough, that is, as taking precedence over all other relations and, indeed, as precluding relations which involve *porneia*. In the second question Paul asks, "How can you be united as 'one flesh' with a prostitute when you are united already as 'one spirit' to the Lord?" In this case, the Corinthians fail to understand fully the nature of the sexual relation (even with a prostitute) — namely, that (as Scripture says, in Gen 2:24) it involves the two becoming "one flesh," an intimate union incompatible with the believer's intimate, "one spirit" union with the Lord. On the grounds of this incompatibility of unions, Paul states emphatically a command fully in tune with biblical morality as a whole, "Shun fornication (*porneia*)!" (6:18a; cf. Gen 39:12).

This makes way for the climactic final question in 6:19. Previously, Paul has used the "temple" (*naos*) metaphor of the Corinthians as a body corporate (3:16-17); now he uses it of the Corinthian bodies individually. What is true of the Corinthians together is true of them individually also: their bodies are holy because they have become places where the Holy Spirit is present. But some of the Corinthians are behaving as if this is not so, and in so doing they are polluting and destroying the whole. So, says Paul, "You are not your own. For you were bought with a price" (6:19b-20). This is the language of slavery, used provocatively — in stark contrast with the opening slogan (of the Corinthian "strong") proclaiming freedom — to remind them to whom they belong and therefore who they really are (6:12; cf. 7:22-23; 9:19). And since God has bought them at the cost of his Son in death, they are under obligation to render to God his due: "Glorify God in your body" (6:20b). Here is the basis for a sexual morality (and therefore a social morality) which neither denigrates the body as worthless nor exalts the body as the only worthwhile thing but in which bodily relations are ordered toward their true end: the glory of the God who raised Christ bodily and will raise our bodies also "by his power."

Marriage Rules (7:1-40)

As the final stage in his instruction on how to avoid the *porneia* threatening the life of the church as a holy society (cf. 7:2), Paul turns to matters having to do with marriage and singleness, matters which have been raised in a letter from the Corinthians themselves (7:1a, 25; cf. 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). It is noteworthy that Paul deals with these matters at length. If we ask why, the answer must be Paul's

awareness that, unless the Corinthians can learn stability and good order in their marital relations, the good order and witness of the church will be undermined (cf. 1 Thess 4:1-8; also 1 Pet 3:1-7). Two major traditions will have shaped this awareness (cf. Meeks 1986): the commonplace of Greco-Roman morality and politics that the health of the city-state (*polis*) depends on the health of its constituent households (*oikiai*), and the attention given in the Jewish scriptures to the practical and symbolic significance of marriage and sex rules for marking Israel off from "the nations" as God's holy people.

But what is making marriage rules an issue in the first place? In general terms, it is the impact of conversion upon every other pattern of allegiance, including that of the household (cf. Gal 3:26-28; Gordon 1997). Now the believer's allegiances, whether as married or betrothed, are "divided" (cf. 7:32-35). So questions naturally arise about how to proceed, not least in basic social matters like sex and marriage (and, as we will see later, food and meal practices). But the question in Corinth has taken a particular shape. Indicative of the problem is the slogan Paul cites at the outset: "It is well for a man not to touch [i.e., have sexual relations with] a woman" (7:1b). Apparently, some of the men in the fellowship are withdrawing from sexual relations with their wives. In other words, while some are expressing their spiritual "freedom" by going with prostitutes (cf. 6:12-20), others are withdrawing from sexual relations altogether, even within marriage. This seemingly contradictory behavior may have a common root. The issue at stake is *the status of the body and the material world* in the lives of Spirit-filled believers (cf. Martin 1995). Given the overwhelming reality of experiences of Spirit-possession (cf. 4:8; 12:13), the meaning of the body and bodily existence (including marriage and sexual relations) changes, becomes incidental even: so the body can be used either promiscuously or ascetically.

Several other factors are likely to have encouraged the ascetic trend in particular. First, the ideal wise man in Stoic and Cynic philosophy is one who disciplines his body by abstaining from marriage and sexual relations. By so doing, he remains "free" from the troublesome desires and worldly distractions which inhibit the pursuit and practice of wisdom. Such a model must have been attractive to the self-styled "wise" in Corinth (cf. Balch 1983; Yarbrough 1985: 31-63). Second, there are also ascetic strands in Judaism. Philo, himself influenced by Platonic body-soul dualism, speaks enthusiastically and at length about the ascetic lifestyles of the Essenes and the Therapeutae; and some, at least, of the apocalyptically minded Qumran Community refrained from marriage and adopted a life of ascetic rigor in view of the need for priestly holiness as God's elect in the "last days" (cf. Barton 1997c: 81-100). Third, there are ascetic strands in the Christian tradition itself. Jesus tradition speaks of those who "neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Luke 20:34-36) and of those who "make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God" (Matt 19:10-12); and, perhaps most significantly, Paul himself (in contrast to Peter and the other apostles [1 Cor 9:5]) remains unmarried and commends celibacy, as 1 Corinthians 7 it-

self attests (at vv. 6, 38). Little wonder, then influential men in the church at Corinth — and women also, especially the women prophets (cf. 11:2-16) pursuing the ideal of celibacy! Here is an obvious demonstration of their newly found freedom and autonomy "in the Spirit."

How does Paul respond to the threat this poses to fellowship's common life? Most important is that he refuses to allow the practice of the celibate elite to be posed as the rule: he quotes their slogan (perhaps with approval) in order then to qualify the ascetic ideal in a direction accessible to the majority. Correspondingly, Paul does not impose his own preference for celibacy (asceticism) either (7:6-7a). What is important is not the position of human will (in the guise of "wisdom") but the affirmation of diversity arising out of what Paul calls *from God as gift* (v. 7b). This is one of a number of places where Paul insists upon legitimate diversity and the recognition of real difference within the church — a theme upon which he elaborates at length in terms of the metaphor of the church as "the body of Christ" in 1 Corinthians 12. Unlike some in Corinth, Paul recognizes that harmony and group cohesion are attained by affirming the diversity which comes from the Spirit, not by the egotistical imposition of uniformity. Note, then, how *Paul's pneumatology and ecclesiology play a very large part in his instructions on marriage*. It is a matter of putting the sexual body in the right context.

Another point worth noting is that Paul enunciates a general principle: the virtue of stability (cf. *menēnēte* "remain," in 7:8, 11, 20, 24, 40) and its corollary, *eirēnē* (v. 15b): each church member should remain in the social (and marital) status in which God has called her. The widowed should not seek remarriage (7:39; also vv. 32-38, 39-40). The married should not separate (vv. 10, 11b). Believers in "mixed" marriages should leave their unbelieving partners unless forced to do so (vv. 12-16). "Virgins" (i.e., the unmarried) should remain single (vv. 25-31). And, as analogies, the circumcised should not seek to change their status as circumcised and likewise the uncircumcised (vv. 18-19); nor should slaves be preoccupied with their status as slaves (v. 23). The general principle is so important to Paul that he enunciates it three times: "let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches" (v. 17; cf. vv. 20, 24). What is the principle of stability? On the one hand, this is a matter of achieving order in a group threatened by disorder, or, to nuance the position slightly, this is a strategy for moderating the pace of change in a group faced with considerable social and cultic novelty which characterized it already. On the other hand, this is a strategy consistent with Paul's strong sense of divine presence and historical contingency: since they are living at the turn of the ages (cf. vv. 29, 31), what is important is not worldly status (Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female) but devotion to Christ.

This relates to yet another feature of Paul's response: his attempt (once again) to offer a more adequate theological and eschatological framework within which the Corinthians may think and act. The elements w-

make up this framework are many and various. There is the warning that lack of "self-control" in sexual relations makes men and women vulnerable to satanic temptation (7:5b); appeal to dominical tradition to counter the trend toward divorce (vv. 10, 11b; cf. Mark 10:2-12); reflection on the sanctification of children effected (by God) through the believing partner in a "mixed" marriage, as a motivation for remaining together (7:14); appeal to divine providence as a "gift" and "call" in order to allay personal anxieties about identity and status (vv. 17-24); remembrance of Christ's death as what defines value in human life (vv. 22-23); focus on eschatological hope as a basis for appropriate detachment from worldly commitments (vv. 25-31); appeal to what "pleases the Lord" and life "in the Lord" as the orientation in terms of which decisions about singleness and marriage need to be made (vv. 32-35, 39-40); and, last but not least, appeal (ironic but serious also) to Spirit-possession as Paul's basis for claiming authority as a prophet and teacher in the fellowship (v. 40b).

What, then, are Paul's "marriage rules" (for detailed and different treatments, see Deming 1995 and Gordon 1997)? First, for husbands and wives (7:2-7): in view of the threat of *porneia*, they are to maintain sexual relations. They are to do so by mutual consent and in full recognition of the reciprocal "authority" (*exousia*) of the one partner in relation to the other (vv. 2-4). Any withdrawal — and this by way of concession — should be by mutual consent, for a limited time only, and for a spiritual purpose ("to devote yourselves to prayer"). But after that, "come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (v. 5). Remarkable here, given the patriarchal values of Paul's day (and the modern apprehension of Paul as a misogynist), is the relatively egalitarian way in which Paul addresses both marriage partners in turn, even to the extent of saying: "likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (v. 4b). Remarkable also (again given the modern apprehension of Paul as "anti-sex") is the absence of prudery and the frank recognition of the importance of the sexual relation for the maintenance of marriage and as a prophylactic against the temptation of fornication (v. 5; cf. vv. 9b, 28).

Second, for widowers (rather than "unmarried," as the NRSV) and widows: they are to remain as they are, in imitation of Paul (a widower himself?). But if they cannot practice that "self-control" (*enkrateia*) so valued by the Stoics and apparently by Paul also, they should remarry (7:8-9). Likewise, the married should remain as they are. In obedience to the Lord's prohibition on divorce, they should not separate. But if the wife does separate from her husband, she must either remain single (and devoted to the Lord, so as not to commit *porneia*) or "be reconciled" to her husband (vv. 10-11). Even in the particularly difficult case of a "mixed" marriage, the believing partner should remain, on the ground that the believing partner "sanctifies" the other members of his or her household. But if the unbelieving partner separates, "let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound [since] it is to peace that God has called you" (vv. 12-16). In passing, it is worth noting that each time

Paul enunciates a rule here, he also makes allowance for an exception (at vv. 9, 11, 15), even an exception to the dominical command prohibiting divorce (v. 11)! Just as Paul does not want the Corinthians to be enslaved by freedom (6:12), neither does he want them to be enslaved by rules.

But what of the "virgins" (*parthenoi*; RSV, "unmarried") (7:25-38)? Probably, these are unmarried young women betrothed in marriage who, together with all the other household members involved (especially the significant males — father and fiancé), are unsure how to proceed in view of their conversion, Spirit-possession and new status as "sisters" to their Christian (including affianced) "brothers." In brief, should unmarried believers proceed to marriage, in accordance with well-established cultural norms and expectations, or remain as "sisters" and "brothers" (cf. Gordon 1997)? Paul's response on the situation of the unmarried is consistent with his rulings on the married (in 7:2-16). Once again, the pattern is one of the general rule ("remain as you are") followed by allowance for an exception ("but if a virgin marries, she does not sin") (vv. 26b, 28a). This is followed by a series of arguments in favor of remaining unmarried, arguments which subtly combine Jewish-Christian imminent-end eschatology with motifs from Stoic and Cynic teaching on the need for the truly wise person to remain "undistracted" by worldly attachments and "free from care" in his or her mission as a "messenger of the gods" (vv. 29-35; and Deming 1995: 173-205). The overall thrust of Paul's advice comes at the end: "So then, he who marries his fiancée [lit. virgin] does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better" (v. 38).

What is noteworthy about this instruction is that, while it seeks to promote what will bring "benefit" and "good order" (7:35), it is far from being socially conservative, in the sense of reverting to the patriarchal status quo. Paul's anxiety about *porneia* does not lead him to a "knee-jerk" reaction of insisting on "marriage and family life" as the way to live as Christians in the world. The call to "remain as you are," for example, is, in the case of the *parthenoi*, a call to remain in the socially exceptional state of being unmarried — hence "he who refrains from marriage will do better" (v. 38b). What Paul's views express is an underlying idea that *exceptional times require exceptional lifestyles*. Some of these may appear "conventional," as with the married who remain married and maintain sexual relations (but now with a degree of reciprocity between the sexes unusual for the times!). Others will appear "unconventional," as in the case of the apostle who refrains from going accompanied by a wife (cf. 9:5), or the widowed who remain single rather than remarrying, or the betrothed who do not proceed to marriage but remain unmarried. What is important for Paul, however, is neither conventionality nor unconventionality, but wholehearted and responsible commitment to the Lord at the turn of the ages in whatever condition and status believers find themselves. As a corollary, what is important also is resistance to pressures from the ascetically minded elite to advocate and adopt — and in the name of "wisdom" and "freedom"! — only one pattern of life as legitimate. That explains why the thrust of Paul's

instruction overall is in the direction, not of reducing options, but of increasing them and (by introducing exceptions, opinions, and qualifications) making them *more complex*: always, however, within a framework of divine calling and eschatological hope.

Finally, striking in all this is the absence of (what we might call) a “systematic theology” of singleness and marriage: which is to say neither that Paul’s advice is completely ad hoc, nor that what he says may not contribute to such a theology. Instead, what is most evident is Paul’s determination — while remaining sensitive to limits to his own understanding (cf. 7:8, 12, 25, 40) — to give *practical guidance informed theologically* with a view to encouraging the Corinthians to act both freely and responsibly as embodied people in ways which will sustain them in a holy common life and a countercultural witness to the world.

Cultic Discipline and the Holiness of the Church (8:1–11:1)

Paul now turns to a different but closely related topic: “Now concerning food sacrificed to idols (*tōn eidōlothytōn*)” (8:1). Significantly, in the earlier lists of vices, Paul has placed sexual immorality (*porneia*) alongside idolatry (*idōlōlatría*) (6:9; cf. 5:10, 11). It is concern with this latter issue which holds together all that Paul says in 8:1–11:1 (cf. 8:1, 4, 7, 10; 10:7, 14, 19). The progression from the one to the other is by no means incidental. A deep logic connects the move. (1) As indicated earlier, *porneia* and *idōlōlatría* are linked in biblical and Jewish tradition with what most threatens Israel’s covenantal devotion to the one true God. Paul’s two parallel commands, “Flee *porneia*” and “Flee *idōlōlatría*” (6:18; 10:14), show how strong is his desire for the church, as God’s new covenant people, to bring its life within the parameters of biblical monotheism. Significantly, both the treatment of *porneia* in ch. 6 and of *idōlōlatría* in chs. 8–10 culminate with the command to “glorify God” (6:20; 10:31). (2) Related to this, both issues bear on the question of the relation between the church and the world — how to be God’s people in a pagan environment characterized by a moral and religious pluralism of “many gods and many lords” (8:5; cf. Winter 1990). Paul’s position is complex and nuanced. In both spheres, Paul wants to encourage neither separation nor assimilation. To avoid separation, he draws regulatory lines through the church in order to strengthen group cohesion; to avoid assimilation, he draws lines around the church in order to strengthen group identity. (3) Another link relates to Paul’s purpose as a whole. If sexual immorality threatens the unity, good order, and holiness of the Corinthian fellowship, so also does idolatry. Given Paul’s overarching goal to persuade the Corinthians to avoid factionalism and party spirit (cf. 1:10), it is no surprise to find him giving instruction on whether or not to eat idol meat in pagan temples. Why? Because the church in Corinth is a mixed fellowship of Jews as well as Gentiles, “weak” as well as “strong”; and for Jews and “the weak” (the two, though almost certainly not the same, may have influenced each other), idol meat is anathema (cf. 10:31–32; also Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). (4) Both issues have to do with the status of the body and the ma-

terial world in the lives of Spirit-filled believers, first, in the primarily domestic sphere of marital relations, second, in the more public sphere of cults, voluntary associations, and temple conviviality. Put starkly, how life “in Christ” affect whom I sleep with (chs. 5–7) whom I eat with (chs. 8–10)? Or, to give a difference, how does participation in the new “economy” (*oikonomia*) of the kingdom of God affect the “economy” of the body and of material (including sexual and social) relations as a whole? (5) Finally, and related, both issues have to do with the responsible exercise of personal “authority” (*exousia*) in a group characterized by diversity. Paul’s question is: Even if we have the right to act in a certain way, are we obliged to exercise that right? This question is so important that Paul divides his treatment of idolatry into two parts and places an account of his own apostolic practice — as a model for the Corinthians to imitate — in the middle (ch. 9).

Food Rules (8:1–13)

To understand Paul’s main concern about idol meat, we need to refer first to the clear admonition he gives in 11. This pinpoints what is at stake. The behavior of some church members, rather than “building up” their brothers and sisters in the faith, is causing them to fall into idolatry. Specifically, the ones who have superior “knowledge” — that is, the ones who boast in their Spirit-imparted “wisdom” and whom, by analogy with 14:1–15:6, we may call the “strong” (although they were never so called in 1 Corinthians) — are exercising their “authority” by uninhibited recourse (no doubt in the company of their pagan friends, kinsfolk, patrons, clients) to the conviviality of temple banquets where they are eating meat that has been sacrificed to the gods (cf. 10:14, 21). This practice is causing serious harm to the common life of the church. Those converts from paganism whose consciences are “weak” by virtue of the inescapable associations of idol meat and pagan temples with their former way of life (8:7) are being tempted by the practices of the “strong” to revert to their old lives and are falling away from Christ. The issue is not just a matter of bad manners, of the “strong” acting in “bad taste” and thereby merely “offending” the “weak.” It is much more serious than that. The behavior of the “strong” is leading the “weak” into apostasy by causing them to act against their conscience (*syneidesis*).

Having outlined the main issue (for more detail, see Theissen 1982: 121–43; Willis 1985; Winter 1994: 165; Horrell 1997; Cheung 1999), we are now in a better position to see how Paul responds, both in terms of what he says and how he says it. In terms of content, Paul’s instructions move inexorably in the direction of prohibiting eating idol meat in explicitly idolatrous contexts: idol worship of the gods in pagan temples (8:1–10:22), with latitude on the question of meat from the market (*idolothellum*) or meat eaten as a guest at a private dinner party insofar as conscious association with idolatry is not an issue (10:23–30). As Dunn (1998: 704) sums it up: “The most straightforward exegesis is that Paul counseled avoidance of meals at which it was known beforehand that idol food would be served. That effectively ruled out

public or private meals within temple precincts: to participate in a temple meal would inevitably be seen by others as consenting to the idolatrous worship of the temple. Also ruled out were meals in private homes where it was clear beforehand that idol food was likely to be served." In ch. 8, Paul's argument focuses positively on what it means to love the "one God," along with its personal and social consequences; in ch. 10, it focuses negatively on the danger of provoking divine judgment by falling into idolatry.

As in his treatment of marriage rules (cf. 7:1), Paul begins by identifying the subject and then quoting with apparent approval the slogan of the spiritually elite: "Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge'" (8:1a). Immediately, however, he qualifies this in terms of (what amounts to) a hierarchy of virtues in which "knowledge" is subordinated to "love" (*agapē*) (8:1b). Why "love"? Because, whereas knowledge "puffs up" the individual (cf. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2), love "builds up" the fellowship (cf. 14:3, 5, 12). To put it another way, what is important is knowledge *interpreted by love*: specifically, love of God, which opens the individual to a different kind of knowledge, *relational* knowledge. This is a matter not of knowing "something" (and therefore being able to boast), but of *being known* by God (which is a matter of grace and gift) (8:2-3; cf. Gal 4:9a). Paul wants the "strong" to see that Christian faith is not a special kind of esoteric "wisdom" which can just be "added on" to their previous stock of wisdom in a way that leaves lifestyle matters as they are: rather, it is entry into a love relationship (with the one true God and with those "called" by God) which changes everything. He will expand on this later, in ch. 13.

In 8:4-13, Paul goes on to apply this to idol meat. Once again the slogans of the "strong" — probably a version of teaching imparted by Paul himself when he evangelized Corinth and which sums up their *gnōsis* and justifies their eating of idol meat — are cited: "we know that 'no idol in the world really exists,' and that 'there is no God but one'" (v. 4). Once again, however, Paul moves to qualify their position by setting it in a larger moral-theological framework, in effect, developing the theme introduced in v. 3: what it means to "love God."

Yes, their monotheistic faith does mean that the gods pagans worship are only "so-called" gods, and in spite of there being "many gods and many lords" falsely worshiped in Corinth, there is "for us" only "one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (8:5-6). Here is common ground expressed in the authoritative form of an early Christian confession (either pre-Pauline or composed by Paul from pre-Pauline elements; cf. Dunn 1980: 179-80). But it is common ground which provides the basis for the subsequent modification of the position of the "strong," in vv. 7-13. It does so in two ways. First, as a confession which resonates with that other great confession — the Shema — which is at the heart of the faith of Israel (cf. Deut 6:4-5), it draws the Corinthians into the orbit of a biblical monotheism whose moral life is characterized by love of the one God and abhorrence of idolatry (cf.

Wright 1991: 120-36). Second, as a confession which is also distinctively christological, it draws the Corinthians toward a fuller acknowledgment of the fatherhood of God and the Lordship of Christ in their lives: the Father is the one "for whom we exist," and Christ is the one "through whom we exist." The Corinthian "strong" are not free agents (cf. 6:19-20)!

Now, significantly, Paul brings in a voice which has been silent so far. He speaks up for the "weak" (cf. 9:22a; also 1:27b): "It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled" (8:7). Then the "weak" are put in dialogue with the "strong," as another slogan of the "strong" is cited: "'Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do'" (v. 8). But the way has been prepared for the climax of Paul's argument. Once more the slogan is qualified, this time directly and decisively, in vv. 9-13. The "strong" are to show the kind of "authority" which is not *bound* to be exercised in a particular way. Specifically, they are to refrain from eating idol meat in idolatrous settings in order to protect the consciences (and therefore the welfare) of the "weak."

In order to persuade the "strong" to the *radical step* of changing their lifestyle on this matter — with all its potentially disturbing consequences for their patterns of sociability and networks of kinsfolk, friends, clients, and the like (cf. Barclay 1992: 56-72) — Paul provides powerful warrants (8:11-13): (a) The "weak," by being encouraged (lit. "built up") to revert to idolatry, are being "destroyed" (in their faith). (b) The "weak" are not insignificant: they are the Christian "brothers [and sisters]" of the "strong." (c) The "weak" are not insignificant for another reason: they, too, are people "for whom Christ died." (d) In wounding the conscience of the "weak" (and therefore dishonoring a fellow member of Christ's body; cf. ch. 12), the "strong" are sinning against Christ. (e) As on previous issues (cf. 4:16; 6:7a), there is Paul's own example to follow. With a rhetorical flourish he declares: "Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat [*krea*, i.e., meat of any kind, not just idol meat], lest I cause my brother to fall" (8:13, RSV).

Leading by Example: Individual Rights and the Common Good (9:1-27)

Paul's appeal to his own proposed behavior in 8:13 takes him into an extended account of his apostolic practice in general (9:1-27; cf. Theissen 1982: 27-67; Martin 1990; Barton 1996). Certainly, this is a digression, but by no means an irrelevant one. Rather, what Paul gives is an example of his own practice of renunciation in an area *analogously controversial* to idol meat. His aim is twofold. First and foremost, he wants to persuade the Corinthians to take his personal example of renunciation and apply it to the main issue in chs. 8-10: idol meat. Second, by explaining why he refrains from exercising his "right" to material support, he wants at the same time to defuse a problem with the potential for complicating his own relations with the church (cf. 2 Cor 11:7-11).

Paul's use here of autobiographical testimony is not a one-off. We have seen similar appeals earlier in 1 Corinthians (e.g., 1:14-17; 2:1-5; 3:5-9; 4:1-5, 9-13; etc.). Its occurrence is a function, not of the apostle's ego, but of accepted philosophical and political practice, according to which the truly wise person and good leader leads and persuades by first person example (cf. Mitchell 1992: 130-38, 243-50). Furthermore, in relation to what is to come, it is important to note that (a) the autobiographical testimony in ch. 9 stands in a broadly chiasmic A-B-A relation to chs. 8-10 (i.e., idol meat [ch. 8] — apostolic renunciation [ch. 9] — idol meat [ch. 10]), the effect of which is to place the apparent digression at the heart of the argument; (b) the testimony in ch. 9 stands in relation to chs. 8-10 as the testimony in ch. 13 stands in relation to chs. 12-14, the implication of which is that Paul's argument is organized in a deliberate manner to achieve maximum persuasive effect; and (c) the testimony in ch. 13 takes up and develops the testimony in ch. 9 and the surrounding material. Here the issue is the need for voluntary self-limitation out of love for the "weak" brother or sister and its implications for practices of commensality; there (in ch. 13) the issue likewise is the need for voluntary self-limitation out of love for the "weaker" and "less honorable" (12:22-23) and its implications for the practice of worship.

The argument has three main parts. In 9:1-14, Paul argues vigorously and by appeal to numerous warrants that, as a true apostle, he has the "right" (*exousia*) to receive the material support of the Corinthians. In vv. 15-23, he explains that, even though he has the right, he does not exercise it; rather, he sacrifices it for the sake of the gospel and the common good — to make the gospel "free of charge" and therefore available to as many people as possible. Finally, in vv. 24-27, with reference to the metaphor of the athletic contest, he exhorts the Corinthians to follow his example and accept the disciplines of bodily self-control that make sacrifice for the common good possible.

Paul begins his "digression" by responding to a possible accusation arising from his immediately preceding affirmation, that "if food is a cause of my ['weak'] brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall" (8:13, RSV). This affirmation opens Paul to the accusation (noting *anakrinein*, "to examine," in 9:3; cf. 4:3) from the cultural and spiritual elite in the church that, if he is willing so to debase himself by letting the scruples of the "weak" dictate how he acts, then he must be neither truly "free" (*eleutheros*) nor truly an apostle (*apostolos*). Hence his opening salvo of rhetorical questions in 9:1-2. Here are the qualifications of an apostle — (a) a commissioning by the Risen Lord and (b) the tangible evidence of the efficacy of divine power working through the apostle and bringing faith-communities into being — and Paul can claim both (cf. 1:1; 4:9; 12:28, 29; 15:9). So, taking the questions in reverse order: yes, he is an apostle, and (as an apostle) yes, he is "free."

On this foundation, Paul proceeds with his (slightly tongue-in-cheek) *apologia* (9:3ff.). As an apostle (and like other apostles and people of status such as Barnabas, Cephas, and "the brothers of the Lord"), Paul affirms (by

means of rhetorical questions) that he most certainly does have "authority" (*exousia*) or the "right" to certain benefits: precisely what the "strong" claim for themselves (cf. 8:9) — but even more so! There is the right to "eat and drink" (precisely the issue in chs. 8 and 10) at someone else's expense (9:4); the right to receive expenses and hospitality, not only for himself and his family but also for an entourage including wives (vv. 7-8); and the right to financial support (the opposite issue!) which makes it unnecessary to work for a living (9:6).

Not only does Paul, with the other apostles, have these rights; he can also claim strong warrants for exercising them (9:7-14). These he lists in ascending order of importance. Thus, there are warrants provided by the Lord in the practice of military service, agricultural shepherding (v. 7). Then there is a warrant from the Law, in the form of the Mosaic law forbidding the plowing of oxen while they are plowing, so that they can eat and work at the same time (vv. 8-12a; cf. Deut 25:4).

But now, having given good reasons for asserting these rights as an apostle, Paul springs a surprise: "Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we exercise self-control rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ" (9:12b). The telltale terms "*exousia*" and "obstacle" (*enkolē*) firmly link Paul's argument here with the larger argument begun in ch. 8. *Exousia* and *proskomma* in 8:9; also *aproskopoī* in 10:32 as Paul foregoes his right to receive financial support as not to hinder access to salvation on the part of the poor (cf. 1:26!), so the "strong" are to forego their right to eat idol meat so as not to hinder access to salvation on the part of the "weak."

There are, however, two further warrants for exercising his apostolic right, more important than the preceding two (in 9:7-12a). The first is the precedent of elders of the temple who receive a share of the sacrificial meat (!) for services rendered (v. 13). The second and more important one is the command from the Lord (Jesus) himself, "that those who proclaim the gospel should not receive their living by the gospel" (v. 14; cf. Matt 10:10; Luke 9:3). But neither the precedent of the temple cult in Jerusalem nor even the command of Jesus (cf. 7:10-11) is sufficient to sway Paul off his course. They establish that he has the right (to support), but they do not oblige him to exercise the right. So, for a second time, Paul affirms: "I have made no use of any of these rights" — adding, with a rhetorically emphatic flourish reminiscent of 8:13, "In fact, I would rather die than that — no one will deprive me of my ground for boasting!" (9:15). There is a nice irony here. Paul opposes the boasting of the Corinthians (1:29; 3:21; 4:7; 5:6; and 2 Corinthians *passim*), but he boasts himself — not, however, of what he possesses, but of what he has given up for the good of the many.

In 9:16-23, Paul proceeds to justify this position. He needs to do so because, in the culture of the time and the view (of at least some) of the Corinthians, it is extraordinary, even shameful. Ronald Hock (1980: 5) has shown that the question of the means of supporting fitting philosophers and sophists was a matter of considerable debate. Indeed, Paul's contemporary, the

philosopher Musonius Rufus, wrote a tractate on the subject, "What Means of Support Is Appropriate for a Philosopher?" There were four main options: (a) charging fees (*misthoi*), a practice which opened the philosopher to the charge of greed and manipulation; (b) becoming a member of a rich patron's household, a practice criticized for the loss of freedom it entailed, including enslavement to the hedonistic lifestyle of the rich; (c) begging on the streets, the practice adopted by Cynic philosophers in particular, but criticized by others as shameful and demeaning; and (d) manual work at a skilled or unskilled job in order to be self-supporting, a practice advantageous in maintaining the independence (*autarkeia*) of the philosopher and his teaching, but disadvantageous in its physical demands and in the association of manual labor with low social status (cf. 4:12a). Given that the first two options were the most common means of support for respectable philosophers and sophists, in opting for the last Paul opens himself up to criticism. In particular, his refusal to accept the financial support of the Corinthians could appear as a snub (cf. 2 Cor 11:7-11), an act of social hostility in the larger context of patronage and friendship relations mediated by the giving and receiving of gifts (cf. Marshall 1987).

What, then, is Paul's defense? Overall, it is that the terms under which he operates are quite unlike those which fit a philosopher or a sophist. First, as an apostle, he is not free to do what he likes. Rather, preaching the gospel is an eschatological "obligation" or "necessity" (*anankē*; cf. 7:26) placed upon him by God (and reminiscent of the testimony of the prophets, e.g., Jeremiah [1:4-10; 20:7-9]), a necessity so serious that he is under God's curse if he does otherwise: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (9:16). There can be no question of payment (*misthos*) for services rendered because — as Christ's servant and as a steward of God's mysteries (cf. 4:1-4) — he has been "entrusted with a commission" (9:17b). In fact, however, he does receive a reward: the paradoxical reward of *not receiving anything* in order that he can offer the gospel of true freedom "free of charge" (v. 18). Put in other words, the reward is that his practice of self-sacrifice fits the gospel he preaches and brings into its orbit people who otherwise might find themselves beyond its reach. Where the "strong" interpret freedom in terms of the advancement of their own interests, with consequences disastrous for the unity of the body, Paul illustrates from his own practice the imperative of restricting one's freedom for the common good. Nothing, not even "freedom," should be allowed to get in the way of the proclamation and reception by as many people as possible of "the gospel of Christ" (9:12, 16, 18, 23).

Paul epitomizes his overall position in 9:19-23. This famous statement probably represents Paul's response to criticism being directed at him in Corinth (cf. Marshall 1987: 306-17): that he is a slave, not free at all; that he has no will of his own but deceitfully tailors his behavior to "win" (and profit from) as many as possible; that he is inconsistent ("a Jew to Jews, a Greek to Greeks") and therefore not to be trusted; and that he is a flatterer, seeking to "please" people (10:33) for his own advantage. As several studies have shown (e.g., Malherbe 1983), Paul's language

here of humility, compromise, and accommodation is well known in political and philosophical treatises which address the problem of the political chameleon and demagogue who seeks power by ingratiating himself with the masses. This explains a number of aspects of Paul's response: (a) Paul has enslaved *himself*, so he has not acted out of servility to others (9:19a). Rather, he has acted as the "slave of Christ" (cf. vv. 16-18; also 7:22; and Gal 1:10; Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1) — a designation not of servility but of authority. (b) Paul's enslavement to others is not a kind of self-immolation. On the contrary, it is carefully circumscribed and qualified (e.g., "though I myself am not under the law" in v. 20b). (c) The goal of his enslavement to all is to "gain" or "save" as many as possible *for the gospel*, not to increase either his own popularity or that of any one faction in the church (9:22b, 23). (d) He does not deny that his self-enslavement brings personal reward. The "payment" he receives, however, is not financial but evangelical and eschatological (v. 23).

In elaborating his practice of accommodation (9:20-22a), Paul refers to "the Jews . . . those under the law . . . those outside the law . . . [and] the weak." The precise identity of the people so designated is difficult to ascertain. Probably they refer to the same groups to whom Paul refers at the conclusion of his entire argument, when he says: "Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God" (10:32). The important thing to note is that these are broad *categories of difference* which are directly relevant to the mixed makeup of the Corinthian church and the problems threatening its common life (cf. 1:22-24; 7:18-19; 12:13). Important also is the repeated reference to "the law" (*ho nomos*) as a normative point of reference: variants of *nomos* occur some nine times in 9:20-21! What Paul appears to be doing here is *destabilizing "the law" as a point of Christian self-definition*. Hence he can become "as a Jew," "as one under the law," and "as one outside the law." The stable point of reference now is not in relation to the law but in relation to Christ: being "in-lawed to Christ" (*ennomos Christou*) (v. 21b; cf. Gal 6:2). What this means is that a new community has come into being, a community which includes those peoples previously cut off from one another by "the law." It is precisely this novel social mixture which is put at risk whenever one party or faction acts in disregard of the rest. And it is precisely the maintenance of this novel social mixture which requires of all its members — especially the "strong" — the willingness to sacrifice individual rights or the interests of particular status groups for the sake of the fellowship as a whole.

The sacrifice required is real and costly. Notice that Paul does not say that he became "as weak to the weak"; rather, "to the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak" (9:22a; cf. 4:10b). For Paul, this means stepping down the social ladder and working with his own hands to support himself in order to make the gospel "free of charge" to the majority (i.e., the poor; cf. Hays 1997: 157 on Paul's "preferential option for the poor"; also Martin 1990). To live this way requires training. That is why Paul concludes his "digression" with a final rhetorical question inviting his readers to consider the analogy of the athletic contest (the *agōn*) (9:24-27) and to apply it to

themselves ("Run!" v. 24b). Paul, like the great philosophers of his day, knows that victory in the virtuous life is not attained without bodily discipline (*askēsis*): "I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified" (v. 27). This is not the language of the servile flatterer who has only his own interests at heart. It is the combative language of one who knows from experience the kind of rigorous self-control (*enkrateia*) necessary if the goods enjoyed by the individual or the few are to be subordinated to the higher good of the many. The lesson for those in the Corinthian church who flaunt their freedom to eat idol meat should be clear. Furthermore, the warning about the possibility of "disqualification" (v. 27b) skillfully prepares the way for the massive warning about falling back into idolatry (and in consequence being "disqualified" from the people of God) which follows in 10:1-22.

"Flee from the worship of idols!" (10:1-22)

Paul's attempt to persuade the Corinthians not to eat idol meat (*eidōlothyta*) in a context of worship of the gods (*idōlōlatría*) now reaches a climax. Up to this point, his argument has taken a positive form: for the sake of the fellow believer whose conscience is "weak," it is advisable to refrain from exercising one's "right" to eat idol meat — even though this "right" is based on the *gnōsis* that idols do not really exist (ch. 8). This self-limitation is the practice of Paul himself, whose behavior in relation to the analogous issue of the apostle's "right" to receive financial support is held up as an example to imitate (ch. 9). Now, returning to the issue of idol meat, Paul's argument takes a negative form: a warning from the scriptural story of Israel in the wilderness to show the danger of falling back into idolatry associated with eating and drinking in the company of idols and idolaters.

What Paul does is to "read" the story of the Corinthians in terms of the story of Israel in the wilderness told in Exodus and Numbers. This is a kind of "applied exegesis," where the story of Israel is allowed to speak metaphorically (or better, typologically) to the situation of the church in Corinth. For Paul, the word of God has a living, contemporary, oracular quality: it is divine testimony about the past for the present (cf. 9:6, 11). Importantly, in the process of allowing themselves to be addressed by Scripture, the Corinthians are given the opportunity to *see themselves differently*: no longer as individual Corinthians who happen to have a superior "knowledge" that allows them to maintain their pagan lifestyle virtually unchanged but as spiritual descendants of the people of Israel. Importantly also, the Corinthians are given the opportunity to *see God differently*: no longer as "some abstract divine principle that sets [them] free from polytheistic superstition" (Hays 1997: 159) but as the "jealous" God of the Scriptures who refuses to share his covenant people with any other gods.

Thus, Paul begins in 10:1-4 by citing those aspects of Israel's story of liberation which speak in a typological way to the Corinthians' liberating spiritual experiences of baptism (cf. 1:13-14; 12:13) and the Lord's Supper (cf. 10:16-17; 11:17-34): "[O]ur ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were bap-

tized into Moses in the cloud [cf. Exod 13:12-22] and the sea [cf. Exod 14:21-22], and all ate the same spiritual food [i.e., manna; Exod 16:1-36], and all drank the same spiritual drink [cf. Exod 17:1-7; Num 20:2-13]." For the cloud and the sea speak (respectively) of the Spirit and baptism, and the spiritual food and drink speak of the body and blood of Christ (cf. 10:16). Even the "cloud" from which the Israelites drank and which, according to Jewish tradition, followed Israel on its wandering (Ps.-Philo *Bib. Ant.* 10.7; Philo *Leg. all.* 2.86) is identified as none other than Christ (v. 4). Noteworthy is the repetition of "all," which occurs five times. Paul's point is that if the Israelites were recipients of God's liberating grace mediated sacramentally; but this did not prevent "any of them" from incurring God's wrath (v. 5). And (Paul implies) if that is what happened to the Corinthians' spiritual ancestors, can they themselves be complacent? Barrett (1971: 218) puts it: "Even baptized communicants are not secure."

The next section (10:6-13) makes the analogy with the Corinthians explicit and drives home Paul's concern. Verses 6 and 11 provide the interpretative, moral-eschatological key and bracket a series of warnings against misdirected desire addressed directly to the Corinthians. The intervening verses identify the "desires" and behaviors which the Israelites were judged. There are four sins, each of which is directly relevant to the problems in Corinth.

First in the list (on account of its relevance to the immediate context) is idolatry, for which the paradigmatic case is the golden calf episode (cf. Exodus 32), associated as it was with eating, drinking, and (sexual) "play" (v. 7). Second, for its relevance to Paul's other main area of concern (cf. chs. 5-7), comes "sexual immorality" (*porneia*; 10:8), as in the episode of the Israelite men and Moabite women (cf. Num 25:1-9). Third, for its applicability overall, comes putting Christ to the test (10:9), an analogy with the episode in Num 21:4-9 where the Israelites complain to God in the wilderness about their "insufferable food." Fourth, perhaps for its applicability to the Corinthians' tendency to criticize Paul, is the Israelite constant "grumbling" against Moses (10:10; cf. Num 14:27). Significant overall is the fact that, in each case (in 10:8a, 9a, and 10a) — having insisted in vv. 1-4 that "all" the Israelites received the blessings of baptism and spiritual sustenance — Paul states that it is "some" of those very same people who did these things and were judged accordingly. Again, the warning against complacency is clear — thus, "if you think you are standing, watch that you do not fall" (v. 12). At the same time, and to counter despair (the flipside of complacency), Paul complements his word of warning with a word of consolation (v. 13).

This extended argument from Scripture culminates in a single command expressing Paul's primary concern: "Flee from the worship of idols" (10:14; cf. v. 7). This calls the earlier command, "Flee from fornication" (6:18a). *Porneia* and idolatry are the two threats from outside the church which, in Paul's view, are most likely to undermine the holiness and unity of the church. As we shall see when we turn to what Paul says about corporal

worship in chs. 11–14, threats to the church also come from *inside*. Paul's response to the threats from outside is to seek to strengthen the church's boundaries. Thus, *porneia* and idolatry are not to be tolerated.

But Paul takes the argument a stage further: from the appeal to the testimony of Scripture to an appeal to the testimony of their own experience (10:15–22). Tongue-in-cheek he begins: "I speak as to sensible people (*phronimoi*)" (10:15; cf. 4:10; also 2 Cor 11:19). Paul wants them to think again about whether their complacency over eating idol meat in temples is "sensible" after all! So he proceeds to a comparison of three types of meals: the Lord's Supper (10:16–17), the meals of the people of Israel (lit. "Israel according to the flesh") arising from the sacrificial cult (v. 18), and meals in pagan temples (vv. 19–21). The direction of his argument is that, on the basis of what he says about the first two (i.e., the Christian and Jewish) types of meals, the third type will come to be seen as out of bounds.

Thus, in a remarkable statement on the significance of the (Christian) Lord's Supper (which prepares the way for the instruction he gives in 11:17–34), Paul says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *sharing* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a *sharing* in the body of Christ? Because there is *one* bread, we who are many are *one* body, for we all partake of the *one* bread." The two main emphases are clear from the repetitive use of the language of participation and unity. The Lord's Supper is a meal loaded with social meanings: it unites partakers *with Christ crucified and risen* (who is therefore *present* with his people), and it unites partakers *with each other*. It is this participation with Christ and the unity of believers that Christ makes possible that are being put at risk (cf. 11:27–34).

The point is reinforced and developed by appeal (once more) to Israel (cf. 10:1–13) and the sacrificial cult (cf. 9:13): "Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners (*koinōnoi*) in the altar?" Paul is probably referring here both to the priests who eat the sacrificial meat (cf. Lev 7:6) and to the people as a whole who share in the tithe offerings (cf. Deut 14:22–26). Again, the point is that the cultic meal is loaded with social meaning (cf. also Philo *Spec. Leg.* 1.221). It is eaten in God's presence and it unites the people together as people of the covenant. So it is not to be taken lightly as of no real consequence. As Josephus puts it when he writes for Gentiles about sacrifices in Judaism, "Our sacrifices are not occasions for drunken self-indulgence — such practices are abhorrent to God — but for sobriety. At these sacrifices prayers for the welfare of the community must take precedence of those for ourselves; for we are born for fellowship (*koinōnia*), and he who sets its claims above his private interests is specially acceptable to God" (Ag. Ap. 2.196).

This brings Paul to the point at issue: eating and drinking in pagan temples. If the Lord's Supper involves the participation (*koinōnia*) of believers with Christ risen and present, and if the sacrifices of Israel involve the participation of the people with the One (i.e., God) in whose presence the sacrificial food is eaten, is table fellowship in pagan temples in the presence of idols permissible?

The answer to which Paul is moving is a resounding "No!" But first he has to avoid the impression that he is contradicting the *gnōsis* he affirms in 8:4–6, that idols do not exist and that there is no God but one (10:19). He does so by quoting Scripture (not acknowledged in the NRSV): "what they sacrifice 'they sacrifice to demons and not to God'" (10:20a; cf. Deut 32:17). In its original context in the Song of Moses, this is an accusation, not against pagans, but against Israel for her unfaithfulness in falling into idolatry: "They made him jealous with strange gods. . . . They sacrificed to *demons*, not God, to deities they had not known. . . . They made me *jealous* with what is no god, provoked me with their idols" (Deut 32:16–21). This quotation provides the warrant for the shift in 10:19ff. from references to idol food and idols to references to "demons." It also provides the warrant for the introduction of the theological motif of divine "jealousy" in v. 22. So Paul concludes: "I do not want you to be partners (*koinōnous*) with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy?" (10:20b–22a).

Just as some of the Corinthians, on the basis of their *gnōsis*, are having recourse to the places where the prostitutes practice their trade, doubtless including the temples (6:12–20), some also (probably the same ones) are having recourse to the places where food and drink and conviviality are to be found, again including the temples. Likewise, just as joining with a prostitute involves *koinōnia* across forbidden boundaries — physical, social, and spiritual — by uniting a "member of Christ" with a prostitute (*pornē*) in an act of *porneia*, so eating and drinking connected with idolatry involves *koinōnia* across forbidden boundaries with (i.e., in the presence of) demons. In both cases, God's "jealous" (i.e., exclusive) covenant relationship with the ones he has called and sanctified is undermined, and, as a corollary, the unity of God's covenant people is put at risk. So to those who think they are "strong," Paul says ominously: "Are we stronger than he?" (10:22b).

But now Paul addresses a new problem: What about meat which is not consciously associated with idolatrous worship but which is bought in the meat market or offered for consumption in the context of a private dinner party (10:23–11:1)? Fascinatingly, if on the issue of *eidōlothyta* he has sided more with the "weak," here he appears to side more with the "strong" (cf. 10:25–27, 29b–30). In fact, however, appearances are deceptive. Paul's position on this new question (as previously) shows him to be siding neither with the "strong" nor with the "weak." If anything, he is seeking to "win" both (cf. 9:19) to a more mature, *other-regarding* understanding and practice.

Worth noting is the way Paul enunciates the general principle in ethical terms at the beginning and in climactic theological terms at the end, with the particular practical problems being addressed in the middle. So the pattern is broadly chiasmic (A-B-A*) (Fee 1987: 478). First, and in an almost verbatim repetition of the words he uses earlier in relation to *porneia* (cf. 6:12), he twice quotes the slogan of those who are advocating total license (this time with regard to eating), only to qualify it (10:23). The

exhortation here to do what is “beneficial” and what “builds up” reinforces his instruction at the beginning of this section of the letter (cf. 8:1b) and is typical of Paul’s entire “social ethics” (cf. 14:3–5, 12, 17, 26; 2 Cor 12:19; 13:10). His intention is to counter the “individualism” of the Corinthians along with the disunity which follows from it. Hence, “Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other” (10:24; cf. v. 33; also Phil 2:4).

Then he turns to specific questions from the church members (10:25–27). On whether or not to eat meat sold in the meat market, Paul’s advice is: “Eat . . . without raising any question on the ground of conscience” — and he quotes Ps 24:1 in support (10:25–26). On whether or not to dine in the company of an unbeliever (*apistos*), Paul’s advice likewise is: “Eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience” (v. 27). This fits with what he says earlier about *not* withdrawing from contact with outsiders (5:9–10). But once again the permission is qualified by an exception: do not eat if a fellow believer with a “weak” conscience on the matter is present and identifies the meat as having been “offered in sacrifice” (*hierothyton*). Even though *your* conscience (i.e., sense of moral confidence) is strong and free, nevertheless abstain for the sake of the conscience of the *other* (10:28–29a). But Paul insists that such an abstention is the exception that proves the rule: it does not undermine the believer’s basic freedom to eat anything with a thankful heart to the One who is Lord of all (vv. 29b–30; cf. v. 26). So if Paul does not go all the way with the “strong,” neither does he go all the way with the “weak” — even if his bias, out of love (8:1–3), is clearly in their favor (cf. 9:22a).

Finally, Paul draws the threads together by reiterating what is most important for *all* the church members if they are to live in unity as God’s elect (10:31–11:1). Of primary importance is precisely not what so dominates the social and moral concerns of the Corinthians, that is, eating and drinking as ways of displaying personal power (or feeling excluded from it)! Rather, it is *doing what brings glory to God* (10:31; cf. 6:20). Paul’s social morality is resolutely theocentric and (as we shall see below, at 11:1) christocentric. As such, it is a firm corrective to (anthropocentric) patterns of behavior oriented on what brings glory to one group of people at the expense of another. In practice, this “giving glory to God” means, negatively, not hindering the salvation (present and ongoing) of either outsiders (“to Jews or to Greeks”) or insiders (“the church of God”); positively, it means following Paul’s own example of trying to “please” everyone “so that they may be saved” (10:32–33).

As in the case of the closely parallel testimony in 9:19–23, the idea of “pleasing” as many people as possible is not a matter of self-seeking servility: that is what Paul explicitly denies (10:33b). Rather, in the context of ancient treatises on political leadership, “pleasing” as many people as possible has a particular connotation: it is the sacrificial and costly business of stepping down in social status and giving up otherwise legitimate rights and privileges in order to identify with and win over the majority, that is, those at the bottom of the social scale (cf. Martin 1990). But Paul does not do this as a “party politician,” for it is parties and factions which he wants the Co-

rinthians to leave behind in their ecclesial life. He does so because he is a servant of Christ and therefore has devoted his life to the imitation of Christ: “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ” (11:1). In his sacrificial stepping down in status and renunciation of rights, Paul is doing what Christ has done in the “foolishness” (*mōria*) of his giving on the cross (cf. 1:18–25; Rom 15:1–3; Phil 2:5–8). This is the demanding, christomorphic model which Paul embodies and which he exhorts the Corinthians to embody also.

Preserving the Unity of the Church (11:2–14:40)

If the previous main section of Paul’s letter (5:1–11:1) has to do with threats to church life arising out of its members’ ongoing life in the wider society (i.e., issues of “Christian existence in the world”), the next main section has to do with threats which surface when church members “come together” (*synerchesthai*) for the Christian meeting (i.e., issues of “Christian community”). Previously, Paul’s primary concern has been to strengthen the lines running *around* the church, to reinforce the Corinthians’ rather undeveloped sense of distinctiveness. Now, in 11:2–14:40, Paul’s primary concern is to strengthen the lines running *through* the church, to reinforce the order and unity of the Corinthians’ common life (cf. 14:40). Broadly speaking, he deals with three issues: divisive gender innovation (11:2–16), divisive fellowship (11:17–34), and divisive exercise of “gifts of the Spirit” (12:1–14:40), with a relevant “digression” in 13 on the priority of love (cf. Mitchell 1992: 258–83).

Lying behind what Paul says on these matters is the unsurprising fact that the ingrained social behavior of the Corinthians in their everyday life is affecting significantly what happens when they “come together.” The tendency toward party spirit and factionalism does not suddenly disappear. On the contrary, coming together in one place provides a regular opportunity for just this tendency to manifest itself. Nor is this a concern unique to Paul and the first Christians. In contemporary Greek Roman voluntary associations (cf. Kloppenborg and Johnson) strict measures were needed to foster collegiality and prevent association meetings from degenerating into faction fights. For example, the rules (c. 59–58 BC) governing the Egyptian Guild of Zeus Hypsistos include the following: “It shall not be permissible for any one of [the members] to . . . make factions, to leave the brotherhood or to be president for another, or for men to enter into one another’s pedigrees at the banquet, or to abuse one another at the banquet or to chatter or to indict or accuse another or to resign for the course of the year or again to bring drinkings to nought” (Roberts 1936: 42).

Furthermore, what applies to small gatherings also applies to public assemblies and gatherings of other kinds. A good example of the threat of urban unorder when people gathered in public assembly is, in fact, the narrative of Acts concerning events in Ephesus: “Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another; for the assembly (*ekklēsia*) was in confusion,

most of them did not know why they had come together" (Acts 19:32). The urgent attempts of the town clerk to protect the assembly from the charge of rioting (*stasis*) and to restore order among the people (Acts 19:35-41) bear comparison with Paul's efforts in the more restricted sphere of the assemblies of Christians. In addition, the fact that the Corinthian meeting (like those elsewhere) is designated an *ekklēsia* (1:2; cf. 4:17; 7:17b; 10:32; etc.) — the ordinary Greek word for a public meeting of citizens — must have made it all but inevitable that the Christians there would think it permissible to behave in the Christian *ekklēsia* as they might behave in any *ekklēsia*, that is, as patrons and clients seeking their own advantage by exercising their *eleutheria* (freedom) and *exousia* (authority).

Gender Distinctions and the Unity of the Church (11:2-16)

One area where (at least some of) the Corinthians are exercising their freedom has to do with gender distinctions. When one reads between the lines, it appears that Christian women prophets — perhaps the women "holy in body and spirit" of 7:34 (so MacDonald 1990) — are expressing their new authority by disregarding conventional symbols of female identity and subordination. As people who have been remade by baptism as God's new creation where "in Christ" there is "no male and female" (Gal 3:27-28; cf. Meeks 1974), they are praying and prophesying with their heads "uncovered." Once again, therefore, the question Paul is addressing has to do with the appropriate *embodiment* (both individual and social) of Christian identity (cf. 1 Corinthians 7). In this case, the women's sense of new identity expresses itself in innovation relating to the head: specifically, letting their hair down and/or removing their veils (the matter is debated; cf. Wire 1990: 220-23), and so "uncovering" their heads (11:3-5). Because the head is a symbolic location of authority, and hairstyle is emblematic of status and group affiliation, such innovation seems to be causing contention in the church and perhaps also in the wider society. It represents a challenge to conventional patterns of authority which assume a hierarchical and patriarchal order of "headship."

But the anxiety may be related to other factors as well. Fiorenza (1983: 227), for example, points to a range of evidence showing Greek women in the mystery cults engaging in acts of worship with their heads uncovered or their hair hanging loose or both: "Such a sight of disheveled hair would be quite common in the ecstatic worship of oriental divinities. . . . Disheveled hair and head thrown back were typical for the maenads in the cult of Dionysos, in that of Cybele, the Pythia at Delphi, the Sibyl, and unbound hair was necessary for a woman to produce an effective magical incantation. . . . Flowing and unbound hair was also found in the Isis cult, which had a major center in Corinth." Against this background, Paul may be concerned that the gatherings of the Corinthians are becoming indistinguishable from those of pagan idolaters. Whatever the precise details (cf. Fee 1987: 491-530), it is clear that Paul resists this innovation and seeks to reimpose the conventional symbols of gen-

der differentiation for the sake of good order, while at the same time providing arguments that will not detract from women's legitimate authority and, more positively still, will encourage the Corinthians as a whole in their worship, in the company of the angelic hosts, of the one true God.

What Paul says overall invites a number of comments. (a) Paul punctuates his argument with theological and christological reflection. There is the characteristic monotheism at the outset (" . . . the head of Christ is God," 11:3), the appeal to the scriptural idea of the "image of God" (v. 7), the important christological and ecclesiological point of reference "in the Lord" (v. 11), and the confession that "all things come from God" toward the end (v. 12). However we judge individual points, Paul's determination to argue from theological first principles merits note.

(b) In a section comparable to his earlier treatment of gender relations in ch. 7, Paul addresses his argument to both men and women reciprocally: "Any man who prays or prophesies. . . . Any woman who prays or prophesies . . ." (11:4-5a, cf. vv. 7-12). Thus, although it is the women prophets who are the cause of anxiety (cf. vv. 13-15), Paul's response is to seek to bring both women and men within the same moral and ecclesial orbit. Why? Because the mutual interdependence of women and men is a basic building block of the unity of church members as a whole. Note, too, that Paul's argument is not just about how wives and husbands should pray and prophesy. The main focus in ch. 7 is on wives and husbands, here it is more widely on women and men. Paul's clear assumption is that peace and good order in the *ekklēsia* depend not just on peace between wives and husbands but on peace between the female and male members in general.

(c) Paul is not objecting to women praying and prophesying. This, together with the fact that women (as well as men?) are praying and prophesying with such abandon, is important testimony to the liberating impact of Spirit-possession in the Pauline churches and in early Christianity generally (cf. Dunn 1975). Indeed, from a social-psychological point of view, one of the reasons why women were attracted to membership in the churches may have been the new identity, authority, and social participation it made possible. Given the high priority Paul attached to the gift of prophecy (cf. 12:28; 14:1-5), it is very significant that underlying what Paul says is the assumption that women as well as men are empowered by God's Spirit to pray and prophesy. Paul's basic concern is not with women's authority to prophesy but with the way they embody that authority.

(d) Specifically, Paul resists ways of embodying spiritual (or "religious") authority which blur gender distinctions. For Paul — as he goes on to argue in ch. 12 — true Christian unity is not a matter of obliterating distinctions but of acknowledging them and making space for them in ways that enable the enrichment of the whole. Just as he refuses to allow those with "knowledge" to act in ways which fail to make space for the "weak" (chs. 8-10), so now he resists ways of embodying spiritual authority which fail to respect conventional ways of symbolizing the difference between women and men.

corrective and a control (10:14-22; 11:23-26). Appeal to the tradition of the Lord's Supper (*deipnon*) is significant not only because of its direct relevance to the way each of the Corinthians is eating his or her own meal (*to idion deipnon*) but also because it is part of the larger tradition concerning the death of Christ, which is Paul's constant point of reference for transforming the church's life (cf. 1:18-4:21).

At first sight, the shift Paul makes from the controversy over the women prophets' headcoverings/hair-styles (11:2-16) to the disorderliness of the church's meal practices (vv. 17-34) is hard to follow. But the links are threefold. First, there is a common concern with how to reconcile the freedom and authority of the individual believer and the imperative of "building up" the church as a single body. Second, there is a common concern with the role of memory in building a common life and the associated need for the right interpretation of authoritative tradition (cf. vv. 2, 23), a concern which surfaces again in ch. 15. Third, there is the social-anthropological point that, in both sections, concerns about identity and order in the church find a symbolic focus in rules governing the control of body surfaces and orifices: in the former case, the symbolic focus is the head and hair of the women prophets; in the latter, the focus is the ingestion of food and drink in the course of the common meal (cf. Neyrey 1990: 102-47).

The section has three parts: 11:17-22, 23-26, and 27-34. In vv. 17-22, Paul expresses his strong disapproval of the Corinthians' table fellowship. What should have been a ritual of incorporation and group solidarity, with members of the one body sharing their food and drink in acts of reciprocal hospitality (cf. Neyrey 1996: 159-82), seems to have degenerated into a ritual of rivalry and competitive display threatening to split the fellowship (vv. 18-21). The common meal has become anything but "common." In particular, disparities of wealth and status between members are being dramatized every time they "come together" to eat. How could this be? What is causing the breakdown into "divisions" (*schismata*) and "factions" (*haireseis*)? Vv. 21-22a provide the clue: "For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper [*to idion deipnon*], and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?"

The practice presupposed here is something like a "potluck" supper. When the Christians gather they bring "their own" food and drink with them. However, whereas potluck suppers in the modern West are (ideally) democratic and egalitarian because reciprocity is fairly balanced, in antiquity they were an opportunity, via the practice of unequal reciprocity, to display social superiority and gain social advantage in a competition between rival patrons (cf. Chow 1992: 110-12). A good illustration of the way meals convey meanings of this kind comes from Pliny, describing (what he considers) the social ineptitude of a host at whose table he has dined recently: "Some very elegant dishes were served up to himself and a few more of the company; while those which were placed before the rest were cheap and paltry. He had ap-

portioned in small flagons three different sorts of wine; but you are not to suppose it was that the guests might take their choice: on the contrary, that they might not choose at all. One was for himself and me; the next for his friends of a lower order (for, you must know, he measures out his friendship according to the degrees of quality); and the third for his own freedmen and mine . . ." (Letters 2.6, quoted in Theissen 1982: 156-57). Against this background, we can see that what is the accepted (if not always approved) meal practice in the households of the society-at-large is being carried over into the meal practice of the church. And of course, this is a tendency which is understandable given that church meetings took place, not in special, purpose-built church buildings — a later development — but in the private houses of the (presumably more prominent and wealthy) members (cf. Barton 1986; for a different view of the social stratification implied in this text, see Meggitt 1998: 118-22).

Paul's response to this serious threat to the church's common life is to appeal to the normative (and, in principle, unifying) tradition of the Lord's Supper (11:23-26; cf. Luke 22:17-19; also Matt 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24). This tradition is not new to the Corinthians. It is authoritative tradition ("from the Lord") which Paul "handed on" to them in his original teaching (11:23) but which, by a kind of social amnesia induced by prevailing cultural norms, they seem to have forgotten. In reminding them of this Lord's Supper tradition, Paul is offering the Corinthians a framework for reordering both their common meal and the way they think about it: (a) it is "the Lord's meal" (*kyriakon deipnon*), not anyone's "own meal" (*idion deipnon*); (b) it is a meal of solemn remembrance (*anamnēsis*) and proclamation of the sacrificial ("for you") death of Christ; (c) participation in the meal signifies participation in the "new covenant" relationship with God which the death of Christ makes possible; (d) if it follows the (Passover) pattern of the Lord's Supper, it has a clear beginning (the bread) and ending (the cup); (e) it has an eschatological dimension ("until he comes") with the corollary that it symbolizes both salvation and judgment.

On this basis, Paul calls for a major transformation in the Corinthians' common meal (11:27-34). His goal is for the meal to function as it should, not as a ritual of social enmity but as a ritual of "new covenant" incorporation which, in effect, brings three "bodies" into proper relation with each other: the bodies of individual believers, the social body of the church, and the body of Christ risen and returning (cf. also 10:16-17). That is what is signified in the injunction not to "eat the bread or drink the cup" — which comes emphatically three times (11:27, 28, 29) — without proper "discerning" (*diakrinein*). The discernment required is more than personal self-examination if that is taken in an individualistic, privatized sense. It is a discernment that tests whether or not the individual's practice of table fellowship accords with and contributes to the soteriological and covenantal nature of the meal itself. If it does not, then what is intended to be a material and symbolic instrument of salvation becomes an instrument of judgment, after the biblical pattern.

To put it another way, like holiness the meal has a dangerous quality: those who eat and drink “without discerning the body” invite divine judgment: “For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died” (11:30). However strange in relation to modern sentiments, Paul assumes that there is an intimate connection (the “mechanics” of which are left unspecified, but are elucidated in Martin 1995: 190–97) between the “material” and the “spiritual,” between the well-being of individual bodies and the well-being of the social body. That is why individual and corporate judgment are required (vv. 31–32). As in earlier cases (cf. 5:1–12; 6:1–11), Paul wants the church members to take more responsibility for their common life in recognition of the Lordship of Christ and of the eschatological horizon of their existence. Thus, in a final admonition which, by beginning and ending with *synerchesthai* (“to come together”), shows Paul’s overarching concern with the Corinthians’ pattern of common life, he says: “when you come together (*synerchomenoi*) to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together (*synerchesthe*), it will not be for your condemnation” (11:33–34a). Just as eating and drinking can bring either life or death, so the larger context of “coming together” can bring either life or death. The significance of the Christian gathering *en ekklesiā* is no less profound, no less open to promise or perversion, than that.

Gifts of the Spirit and the Unity of the Church (12:1–14:40)

Paul now turns his attention to what he refers to as “spiritual things” (*ta pneumatika*) (12:1; cf. 14:1). This follows from the preceding in a number of ways. First, it continues Paul’s attempt to persuade the Corinthians to reorder their behavior when they “come together” as a Christian *ekklesia* (chs. 11–14). Second, as with gender relations and table fellowship, it is another area of controversy with the potential to divide the fellowship. Third, as in the case of the controversy over idol meat, a central concern is the relation between individual freedom and authority on the one hand and solidarity with the fellowship on the other. Indeed, Paul draws attention to the continuity at this point by structuring the argument of chs. 12–14 in the same way as the argument of chs. 8–10. In both cases he addresses the same issue twice (chs. 8 and 10, 12 and 14), each time moving from a more conciliatory to a more uncompromising position; and in both cases, the two-stage argument is “interrupted” by an appeal to the overriding Christian virtue — self-renunciation (ch. 9) or love (ch. 13) — the exercise of which is to govern action on the respective issues being addressed.

Unity in Diversity in the Body of Christ (12:1–31a)

The first part of Paul’s instructions, signaled by his customary formula *peri de* (“now concerning”) (12:1; cf. 7:1, 25; 8:1), may be divided into four parts: an introduction on true inspiration and the Spirit (12:1–3), a discussion of the diversity of manifestations of the Spirit within the one body (vv. 4–11), an elaboration of the analogy of the body to illustrate the possibility of unity with diversity (vv. 12–26), and an application with respect to the exercise

of gifts in the church as “the body of Christ” (vv. 27–31a). As Hays (1997: 206) points out, however, the goal of Paul’s instructions in ch. 12 (and ch. 13) is not self-evident. Only in ch. 14 does a clearer picture of the problem emerge: certain “spiritual gifts” (glossolalia in particular), along with those who exercise them, are being exalted in ways which are detrimental to the stability and upbuilding of the church as a whole (cf. 14:5, 12, 26, 40). That Paul devotes so much attention to this problem and handles it with such care indicates (as with the idol-meat problem) how sensitive an issue it is and how vital for the preservation of the fellowship to get it right.

So Paul begins, not with the problem itself, but further back. As a skilled “pastoral theologian,” he begins at the beginning: with a doctrine of the Spirit. With a touch of irony, in view of the Corinthians’ confidence in their spiritual prowess, Paul tells them that in the matter of “spiritual things” he does not want them to be ignorant (12:1). He then makes a basic distinction which the Corinthian “spiritual enthusiasts” may have forgotten, to the effect that spiritual power per se is ambiguous. There is a critical difference between, on the one hand, the inspiration that led them, prior to their conversion, to worship idols (12:2; cf. 10:14–22), and since their conversion, to invoke the name of Jesus in a curse — taking *anathema* *lēsous* in 12:3a as “Jesus grants a curse” (against an adversary) — and, on the other hand, the inspiration that leads them to confess that “Jesus is Lord” (cf. Winter 1990). That critical difference is identified as *the empowerment bestowed by the Holy Spirit*: “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (v. 3b). Implicit here is the belief that discernment in the exercise of spiritual power is essential, and that, having passed into the realm of life empowered by the Holy Spirit (as opposed to other spirits), care is needed in order to avoid slipping back into pagan assumptions and practices. Implicit also is the belief that *everyone* who confesses the Lordship of Christ has the Spirit. “Spiritual things” are not the preserve of a select few. All of these implications are important for Paul’s argument in what follows.

In 12:4–11, Paul goes on to articulate his understanding of “spiritual things” in ways designed to inform and correct the Corinthians’ understanding and to counter rivalry and factionalism. We note, first, the telltale terminological shift from *pneumatika* (which is probably the Corinthians’ term) to *charismata* in v. 4 (cf. vv. 9, 28, 30, 31). Something momentous is at stake here. It is a shift from understanding spiritual power as the property of the one exercising it (and therefore something to boast about) to understanding spiritual power as a gift of divine grace (*charis*) (and therefore something for which to thank God and to use in the service of Christ). Second, vv. 4–6 consist of a three-part, crescendoing sequence of statements which balance carefully an emphasis on the *varieties* of gifts and their *common source* in God. Paul is countering two destructive tendencies: the tendency to exalt one gift only along with those who exercise that gift, and the tendency to overlook the unifying intention of the gifts as gifts of the one God. The emphasis on diversity is conveyed with some subtlety. There is the repetition of “varieties”; the variation of terminology for the gifts them-

selves (as "gifts," "services," and "activities"); and the corresponding variation in terms for God ("gifts" correlates with "Spirit," "services" correlates with "Lord [Jesus]," and "activities" correlates with the [activating] "God"). The profound implication is that Christian community is not totalitarian: the gifts/services/activities are not uniform but multifarious; they are given by a God who is experienced in various (implicitly trinitarian) ways (as Spirit/Lord/God; cf. 8:6); and they are given, not to a privileged few, but to all (12:6b).

This leads to the statement which summarizes the entire argument of chs. 12–14: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (12:7). Since it is given "to each," every member of the fellowship is important and has a contribution to make. Since each one receives as a gift a "manifestation of the Spirit," what each one offers is a revelation, not of human prowess, but of the power of the divine. Finally, such manifestations are given to each, not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of all, summed up in the phrase "for the common good" (*pros to sympheron*) (cf. 6:12; 10:23).

Paul elaborates the "manifestations of the Spirit" in 12:8–10, with another summary statement in v. 11. The list he gives is representative rather than exhaustive since elsewhere the lists differ (cf. 12:28–30; Rom 12:6–8; Eph 4:11–13). It consists of nine "manifestations" which can be divided into three groups, taking our cue from the twofold use of a different Greek word for "other" (*heteros* rather than *allos*). Significantly, the first group consists of the power to speak a word of wisdom (*sophia*) or of knowledge (*gnōsis*) — precisely the things valued highly by the Corinthians (cf. chs. 1–4, 8), but represented now as given for the common good, not just the good of the few. The second group (beginning with *heterōi*, "to another," in 12:9) consists of five gifts: faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, and the discernment of spirits. The third consists, like the first, of just two gifts: various kinds of "tongues," and their interpretation. Interestingly, the gifts in the second and third groups, and especially those in the third, are the ones commented on in chs. 13–14. In other words, the list is not random. The gifts chosen are ones particularly prized by the Corinthians. But Paul wants them to understand better what the gifts mean. This is summed up in 12:11. The true benefactor in the Christian *ekklesia* is not a wealthy patron but the Holy Spirit; and the gifts are given, not according to status or merit but in freedom by "the same Spirit." As such, they are for the building up of the church in the Spirit, not for its division into factions (i.e., a kind of spiritual elite versus the rest).

In passing, the picture implied here of what happens (or ought to happen) when the Corinthians "come together" is worth noting (cf. Dunn 1975: 199–342). As well as the eating together, with its Passover and eucharistic elements and its eschatological ("until he comes") ethos (10:14–21; 11:20–34), there is the exercise of a plethora of (what we have come to call) charismatic gifts, prominent among which are inspired speech of various kinds, miracle-working faith (cf. 13:2b, 13a), and gifts of healing. These connote at least two things: (a) a strong sense of

the presence of the Spirit energizing all the believers and distributed in ways neither predictable nor conventional (cf. the women prophets in 11:2–16); and (b) an eschatological self-understanding according to which the life of heaven is anticipated in the Corinthians' own common life, especially in the practice of inspired speech (cf. "tongues of angels" in 13:1), and in the working of miracles (*dynamis*) and healings as signs of the kingdom. While not without precedent and analogy at various points — the life and traditions of Israel, the temple cult in Jerusalem, the Qumran sectaries, the Pharisaic conventicles, the Greco-Roman voluntary associations, the mystery cults, the philosophical schools, and so on — what is represented here, particularly in its urban, Roman imperial context, is a pattern of "coming together" of considerable social novelty and countercultural significance (cf. Meeks 1983: 75–84; Banks 1994). Herein lie its vitality, creativity, and witness but also its vulnerability to pressures without and within.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Paul appeals, in 12:12–26, to a metaphor well known in the political rhetoric of his day: the metaphor of society as a body. Earlier he has used this metaphor briefly to inform and regulate relations between believers and unbelievers (cf. 6:15). Now he develops it at length to inform relations within the fellowship itself. Even more than the metaphor of the building (cf. 3:10–15), it is the principal image deployed by Paul to overcome factionalism and to move church members toward unity. As Mitchell (1992: 157–64) has shown, the metaphor was used widely in antiquity in speeches calling for social harmony; and Paul uses it to this end also. The value of the metaphor lies in its potential for allowing the social imagination to conceive of the diversity (represented by the various parts of the body) between individuals and classes not as a threat to social and political unity but as making true unity possible through the contribution of the parts to the whole. What Paul does is to take this well-known political metaphor and "Christianize" it by applying it to the polity of the church. Having in the previous section emphasized that the Corinthians have a wonderful diversity of gifts which they have received from "the same Spirit" and "for the common good," he now reinforces his argument by appealing to the christological image of the *ekklesia* as "the body of Christ." The link thus established between pneumatology and Christology is worth noting. It may be that Paul is concerned lest the Corinthians' enthusiasm for the Spirit and "spiritual things" is not sufficiently informed by devotion to Christ (cf. 1:13, 17, 18–25).

This helps to make sense of the surprising way in which Paul applies the body metaphor — not directly to the church (although cf. 12:27) but to Christ: "so it is with Christ" (v. 12). This implies that the identity of the church is inseparable from that of Christ. The next verse indicates how this is so: "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (v. 13). By baptism, the Spirit transforms the identity of disparate types of people into a new unity, the "one body" of Christ. Baptism, in other words, is a ritual of social inte-

gration as well as of individual empowerment. Hence the repeated use of "one" ("one Spirit" [twice!], "one body"), the powerful metaphor of ingestion ("all made to drink of one Spirit"; cf. John 7:37-39), and the assertion of differences of race and status (Jew/Greek, slave/free) transcended. (Significantly, the other binary, male/female, is missing; contrast Gal 3:28! In view of the conflict over gender differentiation in worship which Paul addresses a little earlier, in 11:2-26, we may attribute this omission to his concern not to complicate unnecessarily the point he is making here.)

Paul's elaboration of the body metaphor in 12:14-26 is fairly self-explanatory. The main points are as follows: (a) The overall thrust is toward the recognition of the full diversity of members as both God-given (vv. 18, 24; cf. v. 28a) and essential to the well-being of the whole. (b) In line with Paul's endeavors earlier to persuade the "strong" to set the needs of the "weak" firmly on their moral horizon (cf. chs. 8-10), he argues here that "the members of the body that seem to be weaker [*asthenestera*] are indispensable" (v. 22), and worthy therefore of greater honor. In other words, along with the acceptance of diversity (12:14-20) goes the recognition of a necessary interdependence (vv. 21-26). (c) The goal of this divine ordering of things — into what, politically speaking, is a "mixed constitution" — is "that there may be no dissension (*schisma*) in the body" (v. 25a) and, as a corollary, that members' care for one another be "the same" (v. 25b). This is to show itself in a fundamental sympathy and solidarity with fellow members in both suffering and exaltation (v. 26; cf. 13:5-6).

Finally, Paul applies the body metaphor back to the main issue: the exercise of the gifts (12:27-31a). What comes through once again is the God-given necessity of diversity (v. 28), with mutual interdependence as its corollary (vv. 29-30). Worth noting is the fact that the *charismatic polity* Paul envisages here is inclusive and participatory (all have the Spirit), but not straightforwardly democratic or egalitarian (otherwise the gifts of the Spirit would not be *gifts*): "first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues" (v. 28). There is a ranking here (even if, significantly, it is not comprehensive), with clear precedence (cf. 14:5b) accorded those who by their proclamation of the gospel (apostles), mediation of divine revelation (prophets), and passing on of the (scriptural and Christian) tradition (teachers) bring new churches into being and sustain them in the truth. Interesting also is the inclusion of rather mundane activities like "assistance" (RSV, "helpers") and "leadership" (*kybernēsis*; lit. "steersmanship") alongside the more obviously "charismatic" activities such as miracle working and speaking in tongues. In fact, the gift of tongues is placed last three times in this chapter (at 12:10, 28, 30). This will have come as a shock to the spiritual enthusiasts for whom tongues speaking is the preeminent sign of Spirit possession; and Paul will have meant it so. To accentuate the point, he concludes with an exhortation to "strive for the greater gifts" (v. 31a). As we will see in ch. 14, this is a reference, not to "tongues," but to prophecy.

The Unifying Way of Love (12:31b-13:13)

Before he proceeds, however, Paul pauses for another of his rhetorically weighty "digressions." As in 9:1-27, Paul interrupts his argument to introduce the fundamental principle (or, better, *model*) which ought to govern behavior on the subject under discussion. In ch. 9 it had to do with individual self-denial for the sake of the common good; here, in ch. 13, it has to do with the positive corollary: *the priority of love for sustaining the common good*. And, as in ch. 9, Paul undertakes this elaboration by appeal to his own apostolic ministry as embodying and displaying the model he is commending. Like a good father or a good philosopher, Paul teaches by concrete, personal example. The Corinthians will learn the practice of love if they "imitate" him (cf. 11:1). Hence the sudden shift from the second person plural in 12:1-31a to the first person singular in 12:31b (cf. 8:13) — "And I will show you a still more excellent way" — with the return to the second person plural in 14:1.

A few general points about love (*agapē*) are worth making at the outset. (a) Love is presented as the "more excellent way (*hodon*). Of course, that does not mean that it is not also a gift from the God who is the source of all love (cf. Rom 5:5, 8; 8:39). But at least here, Paul characterizes it differently: not a *charisma* but a *hodos*. As such it is a whole way of life (cf. 4:17; also Acts 24:14, 22) — of temperament, character, morality, belonging, ethos, habit, and practice (individual and corporate) — which is to govern the exercise of "the gifts" and which gives them their very *raison d'être*. (b) What Paul says here about love is concrete instruction for a specific situation (cf. 8:1b). It is not "merely rhetorical" or "sentimental" or "idealized" — as it becomes so often in the modern world when 1 Corinthians 13 is read at weddings! Rather, it is a *social praxis*, performance of which will serve as an antidote to the attitudes and behaviors in the church which are in danger of tearing it apart. (c) Whereas (some of) the Corinthians are exalting "the gifts" as eschatological realities par excellence, Paul insists that, to a degree that distinguishes it from other gifts and virtues (even "faith" and "hope"), love is *the eschatological reality*. That is why it has the primacy that it does (cf. vv. 8a, 10, 12, 13b) and why the measure of love is applied to all else.

The "digression" has three parts (13:1-3, 4-7, 8-13) and follows a chiasmic pattern, with elements in the first part recurring in the third. This makes the characterization of love in vv. 4-7 the focal point. The first part (vv. 1-3) is structured around the threefold occurrence of the phrase, "but do not have love"; that is the crucial ingredient from Paul's point of view. As Holladay (1990: 92) puts it: love is "the primal impulse motivating his apostolic behavior" (cf. 2 Cor 2:4; 11:11; 12:14-15). Three times he names charismatic gifts and actions which he can claim as his own and which are also relevant to the pretensions of the spiritual enthusiasts in Corinth, only to say that, "[If I do these things] but do not have love, I am a noisy gong. . . . I am nothing. . . . I gain nothing."

The actions he lists require brief comment. First, there is the gift of "tongues of mortals and of angels" (13:1). This is a gift practiced by Paul (cf. 14:6, 18) and

highly prized by the Corinthians. As a mode of inspired speech-communication with the heavenly realm (cf. 14:2; also T. Job 48:1-3a), it is a vivid manifestation of Spirit possession and spiritual authority. Then there is a group of three gifts, also practiced by Paul and prized by the Corinthians (13:2): prophecy, understanding of "all mysteries" and "all knowledge," and the kind of faith that moves mountains (cf., on the latter, Matt 17:19-20; 21:21). The first two of these, like "tongues," have to do with communication between heaven and earth — in particular, the mediation of revelation, especially of "secrets" (*mystēria*) about the end known already in heaven (cf. 15:51; also Dan 2:20-22). Finally, there are two charismatic actions of which (once again) Paul can speak from first-hand experience: the giving away of personal possessions (cf. 4:11; 2 Cor 6:10b) and the related act of "handing over" of his body, presumably in self-discipline or suffering on behalf of others for Jesus' sake (cf. 9:24-27; 2 Cor 4:7-12, esp. v. 11). But all of these, says Paul, however apparently impressive and important, if practiced without love (i.e., for the glory of the charismatic rather than the edification of the church), are worth "nothing."

But how is this "love" to be understood? Paul provides an answer in the focal, central section, 13:4-7. At first sight, his characterization of love appears random, moving between the positive and the negative: "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful . . ." Closer inspection, however, suggests that the characteristics of love which are stated negatively ("love is not . . .") correspond with the attitudes and practices in the church of which he is critical and, conversely, that the characteristics which are stated positively ("love is . . .") correspond with how he characterizes his own apostleship. Taking the negatives first: "not jealous" recalls Paul's criticism of their jealousy in 3:3; "not boastful" and "not arrogant" (lit. "puffed up") recall his criticism of precisely these traits (cf. 1:29-31; 3:21; 4:6, 18-19; 5:2; 8:1b); and "does not insist on its own way" recalls the propensity of the "strong" to do just that, in contrast to Paul (cf. 10:24, 33b). On the positive side: "patient" and "kind" are virtues Paul claims (cf. 2 Cor 6:6); "rejoices in the truth" is echoed in Paul's testimony in 2 Cor 13:8; and "bears all things . . . endures all things" recalls his autobiographical statement in 9:12b ("we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel"). The force of these correlations with the Corinthians on the one hand and with Paul on the other is considerable. They imply that, as an alternative social praxis, it is love that will unify a church which is divided, and that, as love's embodiment, Paul is the model to be imitated.

The third and final section (13:8-13) now sets the gifts spoken of at the outset in the light of the immediately preceding characterization of love. In effect, *love is made the measure of everything else*, something implicit in the *inclusio* by which references to love bracket the whole section (vv. 8a, 13b). Paul's main point is that, whereas love is the full and final eschatological reality, the gifts of the Spirit are temporary and transitory. Thus, whereas "love never ends [lit. "falls"]," prophecies and knowledge "will be brought to an end," and tongues will "cease." Contrary to the Corinthians' understanding of the gifts (cf.

4:8), their value is relative and temporary (noting the threefold occurrence of *katargēthēsetai* ["will be brought to an end"] in 13:8, 10; cf. 2:6; 6:13; 15:24-26). The *charismata* make possible what would not be possible otherwise in the time prior to the coming of the kingdom of God: anticipatory, partial sharing in the life of heaven. But when the kingdom of God comes (cf. 15:24-28), the mediation of revelation through "prophecies" and "knowledge" will not be necessary since revelation will be total and unmediated. The gift of "tongues" likewise will be unnecessary because communication will be total, "face to face" (cf. 13:12). All that will be left, all that will be necessary, will be the completeness (*to teleion*, v. 10) of relation, human and divine, which is love.

In 13:11-12 Paul drives his point home with the aid of two metaphors pertinent, as ever, to the Corinthian situation. The first is the metaphor of growth to maturity (v. 11). By appealing again to his apostolic autobiography, he challenges the Corinthians — ironically, in view of their self-estimation as mature already (cf. 3:1-4) — to grow up in their understanding and practice of the gifts by "putting an end" (*katargein* again) to "childish ways." To drive home the point that they have not yet "arrived" and that their *gnōsis* is partial only, Paul then introduces a second metaphor with an interpretative elaboration: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly [lit. "in a riddle"], but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (13:12). Note the twofold contrast between "now" and "then": an eschatological distinction which the Corinthians appear to have forgotten in their claim to have "arrived" spiritually already. For Paul, direct, unmediated knowledge of God — a "knowledge" which is not narrowly "intellectual" but the moral-relational "knowledge" which is *agapē* (cf. 8:1-3) — lies still in the future, at a time when God and mortals will communicate no longer "in riddles" but as God spoke with Moses, "face to face" (cf. Num 12:6-8).

Prior to the coming of the kingdom in all its fullness, however, "faith, hope, and love abide [better: "remain"]" (13:13a). Hays (1997: 231) explains this triad of virtues in appropriate, theocentric vein: "Faith is the trust that we direct toward the God of Israel, who has kept faith with his covenant promises by putting forward Jesus for our sake and raising him to new life; hope focuses our fervent desire to see a broken world restored by God to its rightful wholeness (Rom. 8:18-39); and love is the foretaste of our ultimate union with God, graciously given to us now and shared with our brothers and sisters." But Paul does not stop there. A final statement sums up the argument as a whole: "the greatest of these is love" (13:13b). Only when they recognize this will the Corinthians *really* share in the life of the age to come. Only when they practice this will their individual and corporate lives reflect the unity and maturity of the children of God.

Unifying Speech (14:1-40)

In ch. 12 Paul argues for the unity of the church on the basis of full recognition of the diversity of gifts of the Spirit, with the (highly prized) gift of tongues as only

one among many, and all given for "the common good." Then, in ch. 13, Paul elaborates on what above all else, because of its eschatological finality, will contribute to the unity of the church: the social praxis of love. With these foundations laid, he now returns to the issue of "spiritual things" (*ta pneumatika*) to show how their practice can be so ordered as to achieve what they do not achieve at present — namely, the "building up" of the fellowship as the concrete expression of love. So strong is the emphasis on what "builds up" (cf. 14:3-5, 12, 17, 26) that ch. 14 can profitably be seen as an exposition of Paul's earlier statement in 8:1b, that "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."

The chapter has two main parts, according to the structure of Paul's argument (cf. Fee 1987: 652). In the first (14:1-25), Paul argues for the priority of gifts which are *intelligible*; in the second (vv. 26-40), he argues for an exercise of gifts which is *orderly*. The two parts of the argument are brought together skillfully at the end, as we shall see (vv. 39, 40). Paul's basic point overall is that intelligibility and orderliness will counteract present divisions and contribute to building up the church in unity. What is remarkable, in this lengthy section, is Paul's almost exclusive concentration on charismatic gifts of *speech*, especially "speaking in tongues" (*glossais lalein*) and prophecy. This is significant. First, it reminds us of the power of speech and language (of all kinds) to define a community (cf. Leach 1976). It is not coincidental, therefore, that the self-understanding of the church as a community of the eschatological Spirit should express itself in acts of inspired speech (cf. also 2:6-7, 13; 11:2-16; 12:3). Second, because speech is an act of interpersonal communication, it can consolidate communal relations or threaten them. A common or shared language is a *sine qua non* of political unity and social concord. This helps to explain why Paul addresses at length the practice of "speaking in tongues." While it may well be uniting individual "tongues" speakers with God (cf. 14:2), it is having the disastrous effect of dividing them from each other and from the fellowship as a whole. So what Paul offers here is a *morality of speech acts ordered to achieve the consolidation of the church in love*.

The first part of the argument (14:1-25) begins with a section urging that priority be given to prophesying over speaking in tongues (vv. 1-5). The primary goal of their common life, established in ch. 13, is reiterated first: "Pursue love" (14:1a). Then comes the imperative to be zealous for *ta pneumatika*, "especially that you may prophesy" (v. 1b). Why prophecy more than "tongues"? Because "tongues" is a heavenly language unintelligible to mortals. It concerns "mysteries in the Spirit" which are addressed to God alone (v. 2). Prophecy, on the other hand, is an intelligible word of revelation, given *via* a prophet for the "upbuilding and encouragement and consolation" of the fellowship (vv. 3-4). On these grounds, Paul does not hesitate to rank the two gifts and those who exercise them. At the same time he is careful not to alienate those with the gift of "tongues": "I would like you *all* to speak in tongues, but *even more* to prophesy" (v. 5a); and "tongues" are permissible in the gathering if the speaker is able then to interpret the "mystery" so communicated (v. 5b).

Paul offers basically the same argument for the priority of prophecy over "tongues" in 14:20-25, but this time with regard to the effect of the respective kinds of communication upon *outsiders* (*idiotai*). This argument is significant on at least two counts. It implies that the "coming together" is not an exclusive assembly — and in this it is like the synagogue and many pagan religious gatherings but unlike the Pharisaic *ḥaburot* and the Qumran community. It also implies that the measure of love (in the form of gifts which are "upbuilding") applies not only to believers but also to unbelievers. Unfortunately, the thread of Paul's argument here is difficult to follow, especially at vv. 21-22 (on which see Dunn 1975: 230-32; Fee 1987: 680-83); although it is apparent that in describing "tongues" as "a sign not for believers but for unbelievers," Paul is turning the Corinthians' evaluation of this gift on its head. What is clear from vv. 23-25, however, is that, whereas "tongues" (because they are unintelligible) will be a stumbling block to unbelievers, prophesying (because it is a clearly intelligible word of revelation) will open unbelievers up to the convicting presence of God, so that instead of saying, "You are out of your mind [like ecstatic devotees of a mystery cult]!" they will make the eschatological confession (cf. Isa 45:14; 49:23; 60:10-16), "God is really among you!"

In the intervening material (14:6-19), Paul elaborates on the limited value of the gift of tongues. He begins autobiographically (v. 6; cf. v. 19). Contrary, perhaps, to their expectations, he has not come to them speaking in tongues (cf. 2:1-2) since that would not "benefit" them. What is of benefit (because intelligible) is his speaking to them "revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching," an important list for the insight it gives into the kinds of communication — no less inspired than "tongues" — which according to Paul contribute most to the good of the Christian assembly. As for "tongues," they are like the sounds of a harp or flute played randomly (v. 7), or like a bugle whose summons to battle is blurred and indistinct (vv. 8-9), or like people who are foreigners (*barbaroi*) to each other because neither knows what the other is saying (vv. 10-11). The analogies are then applied to the Corinthians in terms of the overriding morality of "upbuilding": "So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them *for building up the church*" (v. 12).

He then spells out how to apply the principle of "upbuilding" to the gatherings (14:13-19). In short, the one who speaks in tongues should seek (in prayer) the gift of the interpretation of tongues also (v. 13). The next verses (14-15) give us a fascinating glimpse into the nature of early Christian charismatic self-understanding and practice. Note especially the following: (a) The "spiritual gifts" may be prayed for (v. 13). Paul's God is one whose grace (*charis*), in response to prayer, overflows in *charismata*, manifestations of his presence as Spirit. (b) The gifts are given to promote worship. Hence Paul's specific mention of praying, singing, blessing, and giving thanks to God. (c) They enable worship at the most profound level of human being: indicated by the recurrent phrase, "with the spirit." (d) Just as Paul wants to resist a divided gathering in worship, so he seeks to resist

divided personality in worship: "with the spirit . . . and with the mind also." (e) The principle of showing love for the "weaker" member (cf. chs. 8–10) remains operative; otherwise those who speak in "tongues" exclude those who cannot understand what is being said (vv. 16–17).

This latter point is reinforced by a characteristic autobiographical conclusion (14:18–19). Paul thanks God that he speaks in tongues more than all of the "spiritual enthusiasts" in Corinth, but personal advantage is not what matters (cf. 10:33). With typical hyperbole, he says, therefore: "[I]n church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (v. 19). Then, as we have seen, having applied this argument to believers, he applies it in relation to unbelievers (*apistoi*) present at the gathering (vv. 20–25). Prophecy and other gifts of inspired speech which are intelligible are given priority since they are what "build up" believers and convert unbelievers.

The second part of the chapter (14:26–40) picks up on a problem with speaking in "tongues" hinted at in v. 23 (cf. vv. 27, 33): not only is unintelligibility a barrier to harmony and growth in the assembly, but disorder is also. So what Paul gives is a kind of charismatic "order of service" for when the Corinthian Christians "come together." Throughout this passage we find Paul's most characteristic emphases: full recognition of the diversity of gifts given to each, alongside an insistence on mutual "upbuilding" as the purpose for which the gifts are given (cf. esp. vv. 26, 33, 39–40). It is precisely because these two goals may be in tension that instructions about the "order of service" are required. So the number of "tongues" speakers is restricted, and they are to speak in turn; but even then, only if they are able to interpret what they are saying. Otherwise they are to confine their practice of the gift to the domain of their private prayer (vv. 27–28). Similarly, only "two or three" prophets are to speak, taking their turn, with the remainder exercising discernment concerning the truth of the prophecies (vv. 29–30). Even though Paul can make the remarkable statement that "you can *all* prophesy one by one," he adds straightaway the crucial moral-ecclesial qualifier: "so that *all* may learn and *all* be encouraged" (v. 31). That explains why no ground is given to those in Corinth who claim that Spirit possession overrides the will of the inspired individual. Not only are "tongues" speakers told to "be silent" in the assembly if they cannot interpret; but to the prophets Paul says, "the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets" (vv. 28, 32). All this culminates in a word of "political theology" about the nature of God: "for God is a God not of disorder but of peace" (v. 33). The church, as a kind of Christian *polis*, is a faith-community, oriented not on rivalry and division but on the eschatological reality which the "gifts" are intended to foster — namely, "peace." Nor does this apply to the Corinthians only. It applies (taking v. 33b with what precedes rather than what follows) to them "as in all the churches of the saints."

Paul concludes his argument for the orderly exercise of the "gifts" in a characteristically forceful fashion (cf. 4:18–21). First come the ironic rhetorical questions designed to put the "spiritual enthusiasts" in their place (14:36). Next, a direct assertion of the binding authority

of what he is writing: it is nothing less than "a command of the Lord" — which those who are true prophets and truly "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*) will acknowledge (v. 37; cf. 3:18; 8:2), and rejection of which will lead to rejection by God (v. 38; cf. Mark 8:38). Finally, there is the recapitulation of the argument as a whole, with its dual emphasis on the priority of prophecy (and kindred gifts of revelatory utterance) over "tongues" (on grounds of intelligibility) and the right ordering of "spiritual gifts" when the Corinthians assemble so that "all things [are done] decently and in order" (vv. 39–40).

But what about the now-(in)famous rules about women speaking in the assembly in 14:34–35 (cf., in addition to the commentaries, Fiorenza 1983: 230–33; Witherington 1995; Wire 1990: 149–58)? A persuasive, but not quite water-tight, case can be made that these verses are a post-Pauline interpolation. (a) Some (Western) manuscripts place vv. 34–35 after v. 40, indicating scribal uncertainty about these verses resulting in attempts to relocate them in a more appropriate place. Certainly, omission of vv. 34–35 would iron out what appears to be something of a dislocation in the text. However, no extant manuscripts omit the verses entirely, and all the evidence indicates that, even if they are post-Pauline, they are early. (b) In terms of content, the rules themselves ("[W]omen should be silent in the churches . . .") appear to contradict the undoubted assumption in 11:2–16 that women, as well as men, pray and prophesy in the assembly. They also seem to contradict the pre-Pauline understanding of baptismal identity in Christ (cf. Gal 3:27–28) and Paul's vision of charismatic community, together with his practical partnership with both women and men in his apostolic mission. But, as we saw in relation to 11:2–16, Paul could still insist on the maintenance of symbols of gender differentiation even within the context of Spirit-inspired "coming together." (c) The rules compare favorably with the teaching of the later work of the Pauline "school," especially 1 Tim 2:11–12 (" . . . I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent"). In this light, they are a post-Pauline interpolation of the second or third generation of Christianity, reflecting an attempt to counter the charismatic authority of Christian women by reinterpreting Paul's letter in a more conservative (i.e., patriarchal) direction. At the same time, it is quite possible that the origins of this conservative reaction lie with Paul himself (cf. his omission of "no male and female" in 12:13 in contrast to Gal 3:28), and that 1 Cor 14:34–35 is evidence of this.

If these verses are not authentically Pauline, at least they were judged authentic to the spirit of Paul's thought by an early scribe and so entered the Christian canon. Whatever the case, what is required of the interpreter — here and at every other point — is theological judgment historically informed. (How we interpret Pauline texts which assume the legitimacy of slavery is an obvious analogy.) Taking the verses as they stand, therefore, a few points are noteworthy. First, the command to "be silent" links 14:34–35 with the twofold command to silence in the preceding vv. 28 and 30. So the concern to restrict speech acts which disrupt the meeting is sustained here. Second,

it is possible that it is *wives*, not women in general, who are the focus of concern since Paul says, "If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask *their husbands* [lit. "their own males"] at home" (v. 35a, NRSV). If so, the rules would be consistent with Paul's general support for (a "Christianized") household order (cf. ch. 7). Third, it may be that the kind of speech is not praying or prophesying, but disruptive interventions of a different kind — questions from some about the interpretation of "tongues" or prophecies, for instance. Fourth, it is evident from 11:17-34 that Paul wants to draw a line of a fairly pragmatic kind between what the Corinthians do "at home" and what they do "in church" (11:22a, 34a). The same attempt to keep household patterns and ecclesial patterns somewhat distinct is evident in relation to speech acts in 14:34-35. It is precisely because the "coming together" takes place in a household setting (cf. 16:19) that misunderstandings and strife over meal practices (11:17-34) and gender roles (11:2-16; 14:34-35) are easy to envisage (cf. Barton 1986: 229-34). In general, therefore, Paul's (not satisfactorily argued) reassertion of a modified patriarchal authority — both in 11:2-16 and 14:34-35 — may be understood as part of a pragmatic attempt to establish and maintain a framework of social order within which a Spirit-inspired common life can be built up.

Unity in the Gospel and Resurrection Faith (15:1-58)

The building up of a Spirit-inspired common life is not just a matter of an agreed "order of service," however. It is also a matter of *agreement in fundamental matters of doctrine grounded in a shared, authoritative tradition*. For matters of belief may be just as divisive as matters of practice; and, in any case, belief and practice are two sides of the same coin. Seen in this light, Paul's discussion of the resurrection of the dead in ch. 15 is by no means unrelated to his persuasive intentions in the letter as a whole. The following observations are relevant.

First, the disagreement in Corinth over the doctrine of the resurrection is understandable in the context of the times. Within Judaism, for example, there was a diversity of beliefs about the fate of the dead (cf. Josephus *J.W.* 2.119ff., 162-66; also de Boer 1988: 39-91), and such diversity could be a cause of faction and disunity. Note, for example, the terminology of "parties" and social discord surrounding resurrection belief in Acts 23:6-10. Given its potential as a source of social division in Judaism, it is no wonder that Paul attends so carefully to resurrection doctrine in the pluralistic environment of Roman Corinth where diversity of beliefs about the fate of the dead was so much greater and skepticism about the specific idea of bodily resurrection so much more likely (cf. Wedderburn 1987: 167-211; Witherington 1995: 291-98).

Second, that there is a problem does not surface immediately. Only in 14:12 does Paul ask his pointed rhetorical question: "How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" Attempts to identify this offending group and to explain their denial of the resurrection have been many and various (cf. de Boer 1988: 96-

105). One widely held view is that some of the Corinthians (the *pneumatikoi*) hold to an "overrealized" eschatology according to which, through the rite of water baptism, the end-time life of the Spirit has come already and the resurrection, as the liberation of the individual into the realm of "the spiritual," has already taken place (cf. 4:8). As a corollary, the seriousness of corporate historical existence is being trivialized and the eschatological reality and corrupting power of death (*thanatos*) are being denied. But judging from Paul's response, that does not seem to be the only problem. Given Paul's stress on belief in the resurrection as a *bodily* event, it seems likely also that the view he is trying to correct is one that denies not only a future resurrection but also a future resurrection of the body (cf. v. 35). This correlates well with issues he tackles earlier on, where (as we have seen) those who claim that they are "spiritual" and have "knowledge" (*gnōsis*) are departing from the norms of a traditional Christian morality of embodiment in favor of a morality in which the body is a matter of indifference at best (cf. 6:12-20, esp. 13b-14).

Third, and related, whereas on some issues Paul shows a willingness to be accommodating (cf. 9:19-23), the same cannot be said for his treatment of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. The reason is not just pastoral or political — having to do with maintaining the unity of the Christian *ekklesia* — though that is an issue. Even more, however, the reason is "evangelical." Christ crucified and risen from the dead is the very heart of Paul's gospel and apostleship (cf. 15:1-11; Gal 1:1-9). Everything else flows from that proclamation (*kērygma*). Indeed, from Paul's point of view, it is because the Corinthians have not grasped fully the meaning and significance of that kerygma, or have *reinterpreted* the kerygma in terms of an anthropology, soteriology, and Christology at odds with what they heard from Paul, that their common life is so vulnerable to dissolution. Their "coming together" does not build up because it is so unbalanced in the direction of speaking in "tongues of angels" (chs. 12-14) that matters of personal and social embodiment (including the conviction that corporeal human existence has a past and a future, not just an ecstatic present) are being neglected.

This leads to a fourth observation: Paul's teaching in ch. 15 does not stand in splendid isolation from all that has come before. On the contrary, it is related integrally to it and may be seen as the culmination of all that Paul wants to say (cf. Barth 1933). Although Paul may have made only passing reference previously to the doctrine of the resurrection (cf. 6:14), he has argued again and again for a more adequate *eschatological self-understanding*; and hope in the future bodily resurrection of the dead is part of that wider, eschatological horizon of belief. As Dunn (1995: 85) puts it: "This [eschatological] dimension of the Corinthians' existence had in effect been a subplot all along." For example, (a) Paul's teaching about the cross as the revelation of the power and wisdom of God would make no sense apart from the resurrection of the Crucified One which it presupposes (cf. 1:30). (b) The eschatological "glory" which, in the "secret and hidden" wisdom of God, is the destiny of believers (2:7) is the gift

of God at the resurrection of the dead. (c) Paul's affirmation that to the Corinthians belong even "the world or life or death or the present or the future . . . and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God" (3:22-23) presupposes an eschatological hope in the resurrection of the dead. Rather than being a self-contained treatise on the resurrection, therefore, ch. 15 is a climactic restatement of the gospel of the Lordship of the crucified and risen Christ and the sovereignty of God (cf. 15:24-28, 57). As such, it is a summons to live and die in a way that is not a denial of the body and the reality of death (*via* escape into "things spiritual") but an outworking of hope in the God who raises the dead.

Paul's argument has three main parts (15:1-11, 12-34, 35-58). In the first, Paul sets out what he wants to be understood as the common ground which unites them all: "the gospel" of Christ crucified and risen. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is the first and most important step in his argument against those who deny the resurrection of the dead (cf. v. 12). Here, as at the very beginning of his letter, Paul's argument is gospel-centered (cf. 1:17), and emphatically so: since the gospel is the eschatological power of God to overcome evil and death, a power which Paul "proclaimed," which the Corinthians "received," in which they "stand," and by which (in a process which is *not yet complete*) they "are being saved" (vv. 1-2b) — but which it is also possible to forfeit by believing "in vain" (v. 2c).

But as well as being gospel-centered, Paul's argument is also historical and ecclesial. The gospel has not originated from him. Rather, he is part of a chain of authoritative tradition ("I handed on to you as of first importance what in turn I had received"), and that tradition is a dual one of scriptural and eye-witness testimony to Christ's death and resurrection (14:3-8). As is recognized widely, Paul incorporates a very early Christian confession into his argument here: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, / and that he was buried, / and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, / and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve" (vv. 3b-5; cf. the gospel resurrection narratives). To this early tradition, Paul adds resurrection appearances to "more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time," James (presumably the brother of Jesus), "all the apostles," and finally, "as to one untimely born [lit. "as to an aborted foetus"]," Paul himself (vv. 6-8).

Not surprisingly, given the significance of this material for Christian faith, these verses have been the focus of enormous attention (cf. Carnley 1987; Davis et al. 1997). Here we may simply note these points: first, the phrase "in accordance with the scriptures" (twice) does not specify particular scriptural texts. Presumably these were well known (e.g., Pss 16:9-11; 110:1; Isa 53:5-6, 11-12; Hos 6:2; etc.). More important is the underlying assumption that Christ's death and resurrection are the eschatological fulfillment of God's promises to Israel and the nations. Second, the reference to the fact "that he was buried" is an emphatic statement of the reality of Christ's death. It was not avoided or foreshortened in any way. In this case, his resurrection was a bodily resurrec-

tion from death and the realm of the dead. Third, that Christ "was raised" (*egēgertai*, a perfect passive) is indicative of an act of God (cf. 15:15). Christ's resurrection is seen as an eschatological act of God, an inauguration of a new order of things, and an anticipation of the general resurrection of the dead (cf. vv. 20-28). Fourth, the recurring verb translated "he appeared" (*ōphthē*) literally means, "he [Christ] was seen [by so-and-so]" (vv. 5, 6, 7, 8). Some interpret this "seeing" as straightforward ocular perception, but this is hard to reconcile with the fact that the risen, transformed body of Christ was not "flesh and blood" (v. 50; cf. vv. 42-49). Others interpret it as a kind of religious "insight" into Christ's "riseness," but this view is reductionist and "psychologizing" and does not do justice to the appearance traditions. More likely, the truth lies somewhere in between: an "objective" vision of a real, differently embodied heavenly being, the Risen Christ, in identity continuous with but also different from the man of Nazareth (cf. Carnley 1987: 223-34). Fifth, the list of witnesses, including Paul, is important. In the context, it is a claim both about the verifiability of faith in Christ's bodily resurrection (cf. v. 6: "most of whom are still alive") and about the authority of the ones to whom the revelation was given.

But Paul does not stand on his apostolic dignity (15:9-11)! On the contrary, he presents his own experience as the gospel in miniature, a story of divine grace transforming evil, of resurrection power miraculously overcoming death. This has the intention of deflecting potential criticism (as one who was not one of the twelve and who "persecuted the church of God"; cf. 9:1-2). It also has the intention of serving as a pointed example to the Corinthians of God's grace not being given "in vain" but resulting instead, not only in his own conversion, but also in theirs (if they remain faithful).

Now Paul turns to the second stage in his argument (15:12-34). Having laid the gospel foundations (summed up in the conditional clause, "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead," v. 12a), he at last broaches the point of contention: "how can some of you [i.e., you *pneumatikoi*] say there is no resurrection of the dead?" (v. 12b). Paul responds to this challenge by counterfactually allowing the position (that there is no resurrection of the dead) in order to overthrow it. He does so by pursuing two reverse lines of argument. In vv. 12-19, he argues that the position is self-defeating since it would mean that Christ has not been raised; and if that is so, then the apostolic preaching (*kērygma*) has been "in vain," the Corinthians' own faith likewise has been "in vain," God has been represented falsely, the Corinthians have not been saved from their sins, those who have died already are without hope, and (to cap it all) there is the shame and ignominy of knowing that "we are of all people most to be pitied." In passing, it is worth noting here that Paul does not argue for the resurrection of the dead from philosophical first principles. Rather, he argues from the integrity of Christian faith and hope grounded upon the proclamation that God raised Christ. To put it another way, if the position of the *pneumatikoi* is indebted to a philosophically informed repugnance at the idea of bodily resurrection, Paul's response comes in other terms

— terms shaped by Paul's own apocalyptic gospel (cf. Beker 1980: 163–81; de Boer 1988: 93–140).

Then, in 15:20–34, Paul takes the reverse line of argument and argues that, if Christ *has* been raised, then the future resurrection of the dead is the inevitable corollary. In a word of testimony that constitutes the central message of the whole chapter, he begins: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits (*aparchē*) of those who have died” (v. 20). This is the prelude to an elaboration of his apocalyptic gospel built in part around the antinomies of death and resurrection, Adam and Christ (vv. 21–22), in part also around an eschatological doctrine of the divine ordering of time climaxing in the triumph of Christ over all God's enemies, the last and most powerful of which is (personified) Death (vv. 23–26).

So, says Paul, summing up the totality of human history in a story of two representative humans: “For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as in Adam all die, so all will be made alive in Christ.” Unlike the Corinthians, who seem able to think only in terms of individual salvation (as release into the realm of disembodied spirit), Paul maps human experience on a universal scale, at the heart of which is the cosmic struggle between death and the resurrection power of God manifested in Christ, the “first fruits” of God's eschatological harvest. The point of the eschatological timetable in vv. 23–26 is twofold. On the one hand, it indicates the *inevitability and assured character* of what is to come (including the resurrection of those who belong to Christ), now that Christ has been raised as the “first fruits.” On the other, it situates the resurrection of the Corinthians *at a point yet to come*, that is, when Christ returns. The implication of the latter is that the Corinthians are *not yet* raised from the dead (into a “spiritual” existence), as some of them seem to have believed. Nor yet do they “reign” with Christ in heaven (cf. 4:8). Rather, it is Christ who reigns (cf. 12:3b). Indeed, it is an eschatological necessity (note “he must . . .” in 15:25) that he reign, so that every “rule,” “authority,” and “power” opposed to God (including, finally, death itself) may be defeated (cf. Rom 5:12–21). Only then is the resurrection of the dead possible. But note that Christ's eschatological victory is not grounds for boasting, either on the part of Christ or on the part of those who boast in their special allegiance to Christ (cf. 1:12). For Christ is not an end unto himself (cf. 15:27–28). Rather, he is *the Son* whose mission is fulfilled only as he “hands over the kingdom to God the Father . . . that God may be all in all” (vv. 24, 28). As Christ finds fulfillment in a life whose ultimate goal (*telos*) is submission as the Son to the Father, so (by implication) the Corinthians will find fulfillment and concord in a life of submission to Christ and the Father.

Finally, in a return to the main problem, Paul adds further *ad hominem* arguments against those who deny the resurrection of the dead (cf. 15:12). First, the Corinthians' own ritual practice (of surrogate baptism on behalf of the dead, a suggestive analogy for which appears in 2 Macc 12:43–45) testifies against denial of the resurrection of the dead and would be rendered meaningless apart from resurrection faith (15:29). Second, and in yet

another appeal to the example of his own apostleship, Paul points to the futility of his sufferings and near-death experiences on their behalf if there is no resurrection of the dead (vv. 30–32a; cf. 4:11–13; 2 Cor 4:8–12). Third, denial of the doctrine has a moral corollary. It means the end of hope, which is an invitation to the permissive morality of despair — “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (15:32b, quoting Isa 22:13). But Paul wants the Corinthians to pull back from such a morality. “Do not be deceived [lit. “led astray”],” he warns, following which he quotes a proverbial saying from the Greek poet Menander: “Bad company ruins good morals” (15:33). What “bad company” does Paul have in mind? The answer comes in the reference to “some people who have no knowledge of God” (v. 34b) — perhaps a reference to pagan philosophies which deny a doctrine of bodily resurrection. However that may be, the characterization uncovers the fundamental issue at stake in the entire argument: the knowledge of God. For Paul, *the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is part of the doctrine of God* since the God of Jesus Christ is the God who raises the dead. That the Corinthians could allow themselves to be so influenced by the skeptics among their contemporaries is not at all to their credit. In stern rebuke, Paul concludes (not for the first time), “I say this to your shame” (v. 34c; cf. 6:5).

Paul might well have ended at this point. Instead, in a third stage of the argument (15:35–58), he tries to get to the root of one of the main contributory factors in the Corinthians' resistance to belief in the resurrection of the dead, namely, incredulity at the idea of the resurrection of *the body* (*sōma*, a term which occurs nine times in vv. 35, 37, 38, 40, and 44). This is the force of the specifying question, posed by an imaginary interlocutor: “With what kind of body (*sōmati*) do they come?” (v. 35b). Overall, Paul's response represents a refusal to adopt a defensive posture: it is those who assume a crassly materialistic doctrine of resurrection (as the resuscitation of *corpses*) and show therefore their doubt in the creative power of God that are put on the spot (as “fools”! v. 36a; cf. Ps 14:1). By a series of arguments and analogies, Paul seeks to win the Corinthian *pneumatikoi* to a doctrine of resurrection which, rather than denying the body as an encumbrance to be sloughed off at death, affirms somatic (but not material) continuity between the present and the future on the basis of the power of God to transform the “natural” body into a “spiritual” body, an eschatological reality already revealed in the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thus, in 15:36–44 he uses two kinds of analogies (seeds and kinds of bodies) to argue for both somatic *continuity and transformation*. First, the change from the seed which “dies” in the ground to the wheat which subsequently appears allows Paul to make the crucial theological affirmation that “God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body” (v. 38). The latter point about bodies that are appropriate for different modes of existence is developed in vv. 39–41, where there is a graduation from talk about terrestrial bodies to talk about heavenly bodies, along with the different “glory” (*doxa*) that characterizes each (cf. Dan 12:2–3). These analogies

are then applied to the resurrection of the dead in a series of binary oppositions — perishable/imperishable, dishonor/glory, weakness/power, “physical” body/“spiritual” body — intended to display the marvelous transformation of the body effected by God in the act of resurrection (15:42-44; cf. Phil 3:20-21).

The last of these binaries, bodies *psychikos* and *pneumatikos*, is the focal point since this is the crucial distinction Paul wants to introduce as a corrective. To those in Corinth who believe that they are *pneumatikoi* already (because they have been baptized, speak in tongues of angels, etc.), Paul is arguing for a strong “not yet” (cf. esp. 15:46). In the present, the time between the resurrection and the parousia (“coming”) of Christ, believers are still “soul-ish” (cf. “soul,” *psychē*); they are *not yet* “spiritual” (cf. *pneuma*, “spirit”). So rather than translate as (respectively) “physical” and “spiritual” (so RSV and NRSV), which seems to reinforce precisely the dichotomy which Paul is trying to move beyond, some other way of signifying the difference is required. That is why the NIV has “natural body” and “spiritual body,” while the JB paraphrases v. 44 thus: “When it is sown it embodies the soul, when it is raised it embodies the spirit. If the soul has its own embodiment, so does the spirit have its own embodiment” (cf. Hays 1997: 272).

Paul elaborates and clarifies this dichotomy in 15:45-49 by referring again (cf. v. 22) to the Adam/Christ typology. Noticeable is the way Christology is never far away in Paul’s pattern of persuasion. In particular, here, as in vv. 20-28, it is Christ’s resurrection from the dead which serves as the critical reference point. Quoting Gen 2:7 (LXX), Paul says: “Thus it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being [lit. “soul,” *psychē*]; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit (*pneuma*)’ (15:45). Then, emphatically, the order of the two representative types of humanity is asserted (“But it is *not* the spiritual [or heavenly] that is first, but the natural [or soul-ish], and *then* the spiritual”), the clear implication being that the Corinthians have foreshortened God’s eschatological work by exalting themselves as “spiritual” (*pneumatikoi*) already, the effect of which is to obliterate the very real, eschatological distinction that exists between Adam (“the man of dust”) and Christ (“the man of heaven”), between believers’ present as “soul-ish” and their glorious future as bearers of “the image of the man of heaven” (v. 49).

A final, climactic section brings the argument to a close (15:50-58). First, Paul summarizes what has gone before: “[F]lesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (v. 50). This is so, not because the dead are not raised, but because resurrection from the dead is a *creative act of divine power which involves somatic transformation into a form of (“imperishable”) personal identity appropriate to the life of heaven*. Nor is this transformation a blessing confined to those who have died, as if those still living at Christ’s parousia are at a disadvantage. On the contrary, Paul has an eschatological secret to disclose: “We will not all die, but we will all be changed . . . the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (vv. 51, 52). The nature of the change is likened to a process of being clothed, a metaphor which, again, expresses both somatic continuity

and transformation: “For this perishable body must *put on* imperishability, and this mortal body must *put on* immortality.” All of this is the great sign that death, the final enemy of God and God’s creation, has been defeated once and for all, in fulfillment of the inscribed will of God (vv. 54b-55, quoting Isa 35:8; Hos 13:14).

The reference to the “sting” of death (15:55) brings Paul back to the present and to the *moral corollaries* of resurrection faith which the Corinthians are in danger of forgetting. Because death has not yet been finally conquered, it remains active and has powerful accomplices: sin and the law (v. 56; cf. Rom 5:12-14; 7:7-13). In consequence, believers live in a situation of eschatological tension. On the one hand, they are vulnerable to “the sting of death” and “the power of sin”; on the other, they are confident, not in themselves, but *in God*, “who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 57). It is on this theological and christological basis that Paul concludes with a final, three-part exhortation on how to live, itself reminiscent of the chapter’s opening: “[B]e steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord” (v. 58a; cf. vv. 1-2). The emphasis is on stability in their individual and common life and on devotion, not to the advancement of their own interests but to the work of the Lord. Why? Because, unlike so much of their own effort, labor done “in the [risen] Lord” is *not* “in vain” (v. 58b; cf. vv. 10, 14). To put it in other words, the death and resurrection of Christ in time past and the hope of the resurrection of the dead in time future constitute a warrant *against* futility and despair in the present and *for* the Christian “labor” of love.

By Way of Conclusion: Love in Practice (16:1-24)

The final chapter of 1 Corinthians is not just a matter of tying up loose ends. There is more to it than that. The gospel of Christ crucified and risen in fulfillment of the sovereign will of God is the basis for a *complete reordering of human energy and activity* (cf. 15:58). Implicit in these final instructions, therefore, is a multitude of ways in which the Corinthian body can demonstrate the new life arising out of its hope in the resurrection of the dead: (a) transformed economic patterns (gift-giving) (16:1-4); (b) the exercise of hospitality, especially to recognized leaders from outside (vv. 5-12); (c) growth in the individual and social virtues which maintain the body in unity and truth (vv. 13-14); (d) due recognition of local leaders in a spirit of humility (vv. 15-18); (e) accepting fraternity and interdependence within a society not restricted to one’s own native territory (vv. 19-20a); (f) the practice of rituals of solidarity (v. 20b); (g) the appropriate exercise of discipline (v. 22a); and (h) living in the grace and love which come from being “in Christ Jesus” (vv. 23-24).

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The first main part (16:1-12) consists of instructions about the collection for the Jerusalem church (vv. 1-4), introduced by the now-familiar formula, “Now concerning,” probably signaling that Paul is responding to an inquiry from the Corinthians. This leads to an elaboration of Paul’s travel

plans (vv. 5-9), as well as to instructions about the coming of Paul's co-worker Timothy (vv. 10-11). Then Paul responds to another inquiry, this time about the prospect of a visit from Apollos (v. 12). Finally, in the second main part (vv. 13-24), Paul concludes with some last words of instruction aimed at stabilizing the Corinthians' church life (vv. 13-14, 15-18), followed by words of greeting and blessing (vv. 19-24).

Ties That Bind: The Collection and Travel Plans (16:1-12)

The giving and receiving of both gifts and hospitality are two ways of building "ties that bind." Given the factional tendencies in the Corinthian church, it is not surprising, therefore, that Paul ends by touching on practical arrangements that will increase the solidarity of the church, not least by corporate action on behalf of others. The "socio-logic" may be that the church is strengthened both by looking outward and seeing itself as part of a larger whole (16:1-12, 20-21a), and by looking inward and consolidating its own common life (vv. 13-18, 20b, 21-24).

The first aspect of this "looking outward" involves gift giving: the collection which Paul is organizing for the impoverished church in Jerusalem (cf. Rom 15:25-31; 2 Corinthians 8-9; also Georgi 1992). This is a *six-way act of solidarity*! First, it involves solidarity with Jerusalem, action which acknowledges in a material way the spiritual benefit (cf. Rom 15:27) which has come to the Gentiles in Corinth (and elsewhere) from Judaism, represented by "the saints." Second, there is the solidarity between the various Pauline churches among whom the collection is being made: "follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia" (16:1b). Third, there is the solidarity generated within the Corinthian church itself as the members act in concert ("on the first day of every week," presumably when they "come together") and according to their respective levels of prosperity ("put aside and save whatever extra you earn") (v. 2). Fourth, there is the solidarity between the Corinthian church and the apostle Paul as they engage in this gift-giving enterprise in partnership with him (cf. vv. 3-4). Fifth, there is the solidarity between Paul and the Jerusalem church on whose behalf, and at considerable cost to himself, he is making the collection. Nor is this at the level of personal relations only, as between Paul on the one hand and James, Peter, and John on the other. It is a solidarity at the level of mission also, Paul's mission to the Gentiles and that of the Jerusalem apostolate to the Jews (cf. Gal 2:10). Finally, although not explicit here, giving to the collection expresses solidarity between believers and Christ, earth and heaven — generosity within the churches in response to the salvific generosity of God in Christ (cf. 2 Cor 8:5, 9). In short, the collection is not just a matter of relief for the poor, though it is that. It is a *medium of communication and connection*, binding participants together in multiple relations of mutual indebtedness.

Another outward-looking medium of connection is the paying and receiving of visits and the related practice of hospitality (cf. Barton 1997a: 501-7). This is bound up with the preceding since the collection has to be taken to Jerusalem by envoys. Here Paul's concern to avoid suspi-

cion that he personally is profiting leads him to recommend in advance that the Corinthians appoint their own envoys to take the collection, accompanied either by letters of recommendation from Paul or perhaps by Paul himself (16:3-4). That naturally raises the sensitive (cf. 4:18-19; also 2 Cor 1:15-2:41) question of Paul's own travel plans. Thus, in 16:5-9 Paul informs them of his intention, first, to stay in Ephesus (from where he is writing the present letter) until Pentecost, then to come to them to stay through the winter, but coming by way of Macedonia and the churches there.

In passing, we may note several clues to Paul's theology and practice hidden among these practical details. First, there is the breadth of Paul's missionary horizon, with mention of Jerusalem, Ephesus, Macedonia, and subsequently Asia (16:19), as well as Corinth. The problems in Corinth do not so preoccupy him that he loses sight of his vocation to preach and teach in other parts of the Gentile world. This larger vision is what he wants the Corinthians to share also. Second, there is Paul's sense of time. In part, this is related to deeply ingrained patterns of worship governed by the Jewish liturgical calendar, as the reference to Pentecost shows (v. 8). In part, it is a matter of spending time where the need for pastoral care (vv. 6-7) or the opportunity for mission (vv. 8-9) arises. Third, and related, there is Paul's openness to being guided by God. This accounts for the "vagueness" in Paul's travel plans: "I hope to spend time with you, if the Lord permits." This may make Paul appear unpredictable and untrustworthy to the Corinthians (and others); but Paul seems willing to pay that price out of his prior and more fundamental allegiance to his risen Lord.

But Paul's mission involves a network of "co-workers" (*synergoi*; cf. Ellis 1970-71), and one of those is Timothy. Paul has mentioned his coming earlier (cf. 4:17). Now, in the context of potentially threatening circumstances (given the disunity in Corinth), he paves the way for a positive reception by issuing three instructions: "see that he has nothing to fear among you . . . let no one despise him . . . send him on his way in peace" (16:10-11). If the Corinthians can learn hospitality and peacemaking toward a relative outsider like Timothy, perhaps they can learn hospitality and peacemaking toward each other! What, then, about Apollos, so significant a figure for some of the Corinthians, as we have seen (cf. 1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 4:6)? Perhaps Paul has been asked about his coming (16:12a). Remarkably, in view of the potential for rivalry between the two, Paul responds positively and with generosity, in a way which is a model for potential rivals in the church in Corinth: "I strongly urged him to visit you. . . . He will come when he has the opportunity" (v. 12).

Words That Bind (16:13-24)

Paul now brings his letter to a close in a way which both conforms to conventional Pauline letter endings and is appropriate to his specific addressees in Corinth (cf. Fee 1987: 825-26). Thus there are hortatory remarks (16:13-18), greetings (vv. 19-20), a personal greeting written in Paul's own hand (rather than by the amanuensis) (v. 21), and a grace benediction (v. 23). To these conventional forms,

Paul adds here a curse warning (v. 22) and a final personal wish of love (v. 24).

The exhortations begin with a call to virtues the practice of which will achieve the goal of the letter as a whole: the unity and upbuilding of the fellowship in love. Thus, "Keep alert!" is an exhortation to eschatological vigilance in view of the coming of the risen Lord, a coming affirmed in the preceding teaching on the resurrection of the dead (cf. 15:23b; also Rom 13:11-14; 1 Thess 5:6). The command to "stand firm in the faith" is an exhortation to stability (cf. 15:1-2, 58) based on the gospel of Christ crucified and risen of which Paul has been reminding them throughout the letter. The commands to "be courageous, be strong" recall how countercultural and costly is the imitation of Christ in acts of mutual service (cf. 11:1). The last exhortation in the list is purposely so, for it sums up the message of the entire letter: "Let all that you do be done in love [*en agapē*]" (16:14; cf. 8:1-3; 13:1-13; 16:24).

But acting in love does not take place in a vacuum. Indeed, it is *unloving to fail to attend to the structures and practices which make love a possibility*. This is why Paul adds further exhortations with regard to the right ordering of their common life as "brothers and sisters" of one another: the Corinthians are "urged" to submit to the authority of Stephanas and his network of "fellow workers" and "fellow laborers" (16:15-18). Noteworthy here is that Paul does not shrink from addressing questions of leadership and authority in the fellowship, and that it is the authority of *one person*, along with his associates (cf. v. 17), that is recognized. The reason for the latter may be twofold. First and foremost, acknowledging one person as leader has an obvious unifying effect, and Paul (we know) is seeking to unite a divided community. Second, since Stephanas is the likely bearer of this very letter to the Corinthians, recognition of him will guarantee a positive reception of the letter. But note also the *grounds* on which Stephanas is commended to the church as their leader. They do not have to do with speaking in "tongues of angels" or prophecy (cf. chs. 12-14); rather, they have to do with "service" (*diakonia*; cf. 12:5) — both the service of "the saints" (i.e., the believers in Corinth) and the service of their apostle (16:15b, 18a).

The exhortations are followed by the greetings (16:19-21). Like the exhortations, these are *words that bind*. They bind those who send them and those who receive them. Thus the Corinthians are held from seeing themselves in isolation. They belong to a worldwide network of fellowships under the one Lord. The unity to which Paul calls them is itself part of a larger unity. That unity includes the churches of Asia (v. 19a). It includes also those like Aquila and Prisca who were former residents in Corinth (cf. Acts 18:2-3) but whose work has taken them now to Ephesus. They, along with "the church in their house," send warm greetings: the use of affective language is striking. This is reinforced by the strong sense of all belonging to one family ("All the brothers and sisters send greetings," 16:20a), followed by the exhortation to reconciliation and mutual recognition: "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (v. 20b; cf. Rom 16:16; 2 Cor 13:12). Finally, there is Paul's own word of greeting, at the point where

he begins the final words of the letter in his own hand (16:21).

These final four "words" are also significant. First, there is a warning curse against unnamed, intransigent opponents in Corinth — but not out of vindictiveness: even here it is "love for the Lord" which is at stake, love which involves discernment and discipline (16:22a; cf. Gal 1:8-9; 2 Thess 3:14-15). Second, there is a fervent eschatological prayer: "Our Lord, come!" (16:22b). That Paul's prayer is in Aramaic (*Marana tha*) is an indication that he is passing on to the (Greek-speaking) Corinthians primitive tradition from the worship of the earliest Aramaic-speaking Christian community. In context, the prayer fits well. It fits with the exhortation to "keep alert" (v. 13a), reinforces the immediately preceding warning curse (v. 22a), and surrounds the following benediction with eschatological hope. Third, there is the benediction itself: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you" (v. 23). Here the letter has come full circle (cf. 1:3, 4). The letter as a whole is about grace, but grace revealed in surprising places and people — above all in the crucified and risen Christ and in the lives of those who imitate him by giving themselves up on behalf of others for Christ's sake. The benediction is Paul's prayer to God to allow that grace to continue to flow in the church in Corinth.

But, surprisingly (cf. 2 Cor 13:13; Gal 6:18; 1 Thess 5:28; etc.), Paul adds one "word" more. In itself, it is an expression of the overflowing grace of Christ for which he has just prayed. It is an intensely personal word, the word of a father to his often-wayward spiritual children. It is an expression of the most powerful of the ties that bind: "My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus" (16:24).

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